



# PC GAMER

PREVIEW

## DEAD ISLAND 2

THE GAME THAT REFUSES TO DIE



### VICTORIA 3

GRAND STRATEGY ACROSS A WORLD ON THE BRINK

# MOONBREAKER

*World Exclusive*

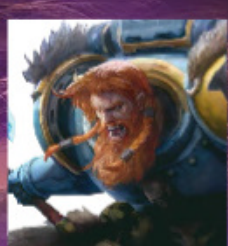
SUBNAUTICA DEVS FIND A WHOLE NEW TWIST ON TURN-BASED STRATEGY



HARDWARE

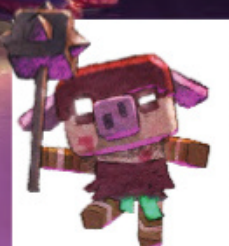
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### WARHAMMER 40K: ROGUE TRADER

CRPG ADVENTURE IN THE GRIMDARK FAR FUTURE



### MINECRAFT LEGENDS

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ISSUE 375



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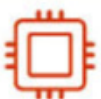
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# “BRINGS THE BEST OF TABLETOP WARGAMING TO THE DIGITAL REALM”



Heading into my first meeting with Unknown Worlds about its then-secret new game, I thought I knew what to expect. As the *Subnautica* studio, I figured the team would have another slick survival game for us.

That would've been great in its own right – but I couldn't have been more pleasantly surprised by what they

showed instead. *Moonbreaker* brings the best of tabletop wargaming to the digital realm – not just the turn-based strategy, but also the joy of collecting, painting, and making your army your own. As a noted Warhammer nerd, I couldn't be more excited.

ROBIN VALENTINE  
PRINT EDITOR  
robin.valentine@futurenet.com

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## The PC Gamer team



FRASER BROWN  
Twitter  
@FraserIBrown

**This month**  
Was the only person even more delighted than me to be messing about with miniatures on the job.



WES FENLON  
Twitter  
@wesleyfenlon

**This month**  
Took a trip to sunny Brazil to discover its PC gaming culture, and to melt into a human puddle.



MOLLIE TAYLOR  
Twitter  
@mollietayy

**This month**  
Had her first trip to GamesCom, and ate an unreasonable amount of bread and meat.



CHRIS LIVINGSTON  
Twitter  
@screencuisine

**This month**  
Modded *Skyrim* to contain more people who hate him.

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## MONITOR

NEWS | OPINION | DEVELOPMENT



## PAST OASIS

After admitting their MMO 'sucks,' **DONKEY CREW** reworks the entire game

**I**f you visit the Steam page for early access survival MMO *Last Oasis*, you'll find an article bluntly titled '*Last Oasis Sucks*'. It's not written by a disgruntled player, nor an opinion piece pulled in by Steam's news aggregator. It was written by *Last Oasis*' developer.

*Last Oasis* is a nomadic survival MMO where players construct and travel in land-crawling fortresses called walkers. It entered Early Access in March of 2020, promptly experienced some major server problems, and three days later went offline and offered refunds. *Last Oasis*

**ABOVE:** The 'new' *Last Oasis* puts much more emphasis on the survival mechanics, and adds roaming enemies that attack players and their structures. The world is now a bigger threat than other players.

resurfaced, but concurrent player counts have wavered between a few thousand and a few hundred since, and its Steam reviews have remained firmly 'mixed'. But players weren't the only ones struggling to enjoy it.

"When I say it sucks, I mean I'm not having fun for long when playing it. Not as long as other survival games

**PLAYERS WEREN'T  
THE ONLY ONES  
STRUGGLING TO  
ENJOY IT**

I enjoy," wrote the game's developer Chadz recently. "We could argue back and forth why [but] there was always that one issue remaining: I, personally, am not having fun when playing *Last Oasis* for long."

It's a brutally honest statement for a developer to make. Plenty will admit when their game has problems, promise to address negative feedback, and outline future plans. But rarely do you hear such frankness about their own negative experiences while playing their own game.

Chadz goes on to say the developers decided to think less about what needed to be fixed and more about what needed to be



ENGINE FAILURE

## GAME ENGINES VANISH



Users of an engine called The Machinery got a nasty surprise this month: an email announcing the project had been abruptly and unexpectedly cancelled. Even worse, instead of an explanation all they got was a demand that they delete any trace of the engine's code they still had access to. ■ **JW**

COMBINE HARVESTER

## DOOM TRACTOR

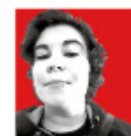


At the Defcon security conference, hacker Sickcodes gave a live presentation of gaining root access to a John Deere control unit, which locks farmers into the ecosystem of the biggest manufacturer of agricultural equipment. Then he began running a version of *Doom* on it. ■ **RS**

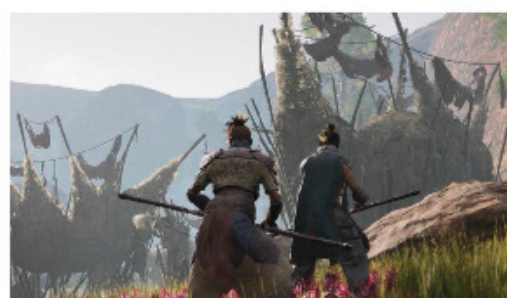


FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS?

## NIGHTMARE FUEL



Generating images using AI is big right now with many using the tech to predict humanity's trajectory. When Midjourney prophesied the "last selfie ever taken" the internet seemed to panic. Empty eye sockets, ghoulish facades and a backdrop of corpses; this is what the AI saw in our future. ■ **KW**



**ABOVE:** The walkers are inspired by the 'kinetic sculptures' of Dutch artist Theo Jansen. Google 'Strandbeest' for some very cool videos.

completely rethought, "If I were to make *LO* from scratch, what would I do?" This led to the major overhaul that came alongside the post. This update shifted the focus from PvP to almost entirely PvE.

### LAST CHANCE

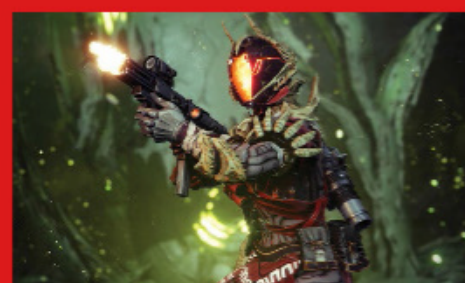
The nomadic vibe of *Last Oasis* has been essentially erased, which is pretty wild considering it was a major selling point of the original. Your walker was your base, a big roaming fort filled with your stuff that you took with you everywhere. And when it was destroyed, typically in PvP, you lost everything. Now, players build static bases and use walkers for excursions, exploration, and combat.

The developer admits this drastic change won't sit well with everyone, and they may have a period of extreme balancing ahead explaining that "There's fun difficulty, there's challenging difficulty and there's ridiculous rage-quit difficulty."

I consider other players quickly destroying my entire base to be rage-quit-level difficulty, but these new changes sound more appealing: I definitely prefer harsh PvE to harsh PvP. As for whether this kind of dramatic U-turn can lead to a brighter future for *Last Oasis*, we'll have to wait and see. ■

**Chris Livingstone**

## Highs & Lows



### HIGHS

#### Rightly proud

After a mod removed all Pride flag's from *Spider-Man*, the two largest mod sites in the world banned it.

#### Stadia's USP

*Destiny* streamer Luckstruck9 used 11 Stadia accounts to keep checkpoints open for other players.

#### Hell freezes

MacroBioBoi finally completed the world's first ever solo Hell pacifist run in *Diablo 2: Resurrected*.

### Overbotch

*Overwatch* pro Myunbong was surprised to find out he'd been fired from New York Excelsior via Twitter.

### Maddening

*Madden 23* on PC doesn't come with the new 'FieldSense' system present on consoles. Stop this nonsense.

### Dead and buried

Netflix has already cancelled its *Resident Evil* TV show after just one season, following poor reviews.

### LOWS





# The Spy

**BUT WHO WATCHES THE SPY?**

**G**amescom is the sort of place where, in 2018, somebody claimed that an attendee, while queuing to play *Fortnite*, did a poo in a bag and left it there, and enough people believed this story that the PR for Epic had to tweet “this did not happen”. Even though it wasn’t true, the fact that so many people *thought* it was true is, in and of itself, a damning condemnation of the entire thing.

It was with some trepidation then that The Spy visited this year’s event. Because even though it was consistently 33°C, and filled with the sort of people that other people think would do a poo in a bag, it’s also filled with the kind of insider knowledge that The Spy craves. The Spy can watch in real time as businessmen construct makeshift catapults to be flung into the closed booths of various holding companies in an effort to get their publisher acquired. Or at least, The Spy could if The Spy wasn’t permanently tethered to the corridor between the third and fourth halls – the only place in the entire Koelnmesse exhibition centre with good ventilation and cool breezes.

The overarching theme of Gamescom was this: if you are a PC gamer in your late 30s, you are about to feel extremely catered to – and not just in the normal way. It’s not just the absurd number of RPGs, RTSes, and city builders that were on show, but the fact that many of them are deliberately harking back to cult

classics of the ’90s. *Homeworld* is back. *System Shock* is back. THQ’s *Tempest Rising* is as close to a *Command & Conquer* game as it’s possible to be without activating EA’s lawyers. Even *Jagged Alliance* is back, and properly this time – with care being taken to do justice to the originals.

## MONGERING FREE

And that’s just what’s already been confirmed. In late-August, Embracer Group extended the warm hug of ownership to a handful of Square Enix’s discarded studios. Both Crystal Dynamics and Eidos Montreal have been embraced, along with the rights to *Tomb Raider*, *Thief*, *Legacy of Kain*, and *Deus Ex*.

So on the one hand, we have a trend of pandering to elder millennials. And on the other, we have the developer of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* and the intellectual property rights to *Deus Ex* both under new management. What’s going to happen next?

According to rumourmonger Jeff Grubb, the obvious. “They want to get right back into that,” Grubb said on his Game Mess Mornings Twitch show, when asked about Eidos Montreal returning to *Deus Ex*. “They want to do what *Cyberpunk 2077* couldn’t. Who knows what that will turn into, but there was no possibility for that conversation to begin under the current Square Enix.”

Again, The Spy wants to reiterate that final line. Grubb’s insight here is that there is now, under Embracer, the possibility of a conversation. Even if that’s more than there was before, it’s not much. Bloomberg’s Jason Schreier is similarly cautious. “Keep your expectations in check,” Schreier wrote in a Resetera thread discussing

Grubb’s comments. “The game furthest in development at Eidos Montreal right now is a new IP.”

Perhaps, then, in some long distant Gamescom, many years from now, Eidos will reveal the return of Adam Jensen. The Spy just hopes the queues aren’t too long. Spy out. ■

*The Spy*

**“THEY WANT TO  
DO WHAT  
CYBERPUNK 2077  
COULDN’T”**



**THE SPY**  
The Spy is recovering from heatstroke.

## This month in... 2012



**1** “*Mists of Pandaria* is more than just an expansion pack,” claims our cover feature. “It’s where both Blizzard and the rest of the world will find out if *World of Warcraft* still has what it takes to dominate the MMO genre.” It did, of course, although post-*Pandaria*, it’s fair to say Blizzard never quite recaptured the hype of *WoW*’s heyday.

**ISSUE**  
245, November 2012  
**ON THE COVER**  
*World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria*  
**IN THE CINEMAS**  
Dredd

**2** Rich McCormick has the unenviable task of putting a score on *Dota 2*. He ultimately settles on giving it 85. “Rewarding like few others, but tough.”



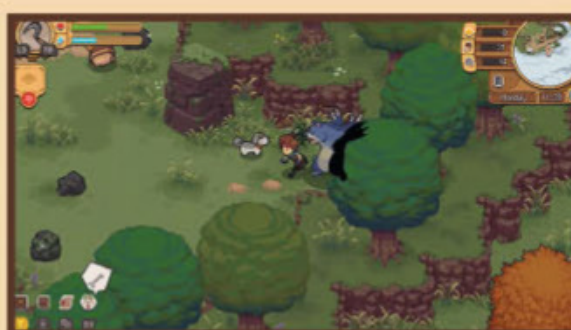
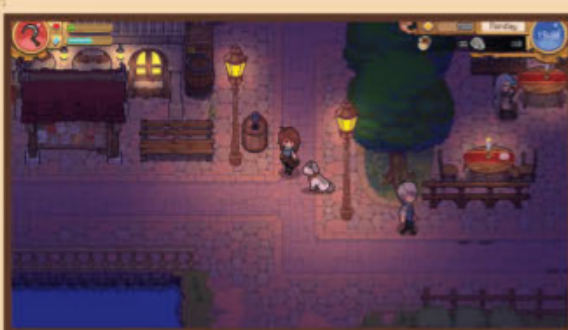
**3** The irony of Graham and Rich modelling for our best co-op games feature is that every lunchtime the two would settle down to compete *against* each other in *FIFA*. They even had a spreadsheet to track their rivalry. Still, *Portal 2*, *Dawn of War 2: Last Stand*, and *Supreme Commander* are all good co-op games, so it worked out.



# POTION PERMIT



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# Special Report

PCG INVESTIGATES



Coromon gives off *Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire* vibes with its vibrant settings and sprites.

## UNCATCHABLE

Why has no indie riff on **POKÉMON** taken off on PC?

**S**tardew Valley is the golden child of farming sims. Inspired by Nintendo's *Harvest Moon*, it's gone on to sell more than 20 million copies since 2016 and kicked off a torrent of imitators on PC. Why haven't we had that moment for the monster-taming genre? *Pokémon* clones are abundant, but none have had a sliver of *Stardew Valley*'s success, yet alone *Pokémon*'s. If there's a formula for reimagining classic Japanese series as modern indies, monster tamers haven't found it.

"An RPG where [players] can create their own adventure based on the characters they know is of course appealing," say Jochem and Marcel, the indie developers behind this year's *Coromon*. The challenge for indies is, "Players would often rather stay with what they know than trying out new games," they say.

There have been some modestly successful *Pokémon* clones like MMO *Temtem*, which made headlines last year when it reached 500,000 copies sold in one month on Steam Early Access. *Coromon* passed 100,000 sales on PC and Mac, and the Nintendo Switch version has undoubtedly added to that. Yet that's just a fraction of *Pokémon Sword & Shield*'s 24.5 million.

Eric Barone liberally based *Stardew Valley* on *Harvest Moon*, but it has now surpassed its inspiration in

popularity and sales. *Temtem* game director Guillermo Andrades says that *Pokémon*, by comparison, casts a long, long shadow. "Right now there's a lot of reticence towards the games of the genre that are not *Pokémon*," he says. "I think we still have to move forward a bit, and a lot of games in this genre have to come out before players start seeing it as the monster-taming genre, and not the *Pokémon*-like genre. Once the general public is more into this mindset, games will get more leeway to have their own identity and not be compared to their enormous brother and predecessor."

### POKÉMON SNAP

Enormous really is the word. Just this year the Pokémon Company reported passing 440 million sales of *Pokémon* software. *Pokémon Legends: Arceus* and *Pokémon Brilliant Diamond and Shining Pearl* together sold more in one year than *Stardew Valley* has in its lifetime.

*Harvest Moon* was successful, but not a worldwide cultural phenomenon. *Pokémon* is the highest-grossing media franchise in history. Perhaps many of us aren't invested enough in taming monsters other than *Pokémon* to learn 100 new ones. Developers haven't given up on trying to turn *Pokémon* into a genre, though – and they're at least getting some attention, *Stardew Valley*'s first step towards fame.



### Monster success

Game Freak CEO Satoshi Tajiri created *Pokémon* using inspiration from his childhood days collecting insects. Nintendo execs initially rejected his pitch, but Shigeru Miyamoto convinced the company to reconsider. The *Mario* and *Zelda* creator also helped shaped the series' future, including the idea to create version exclusive *Pokémon* so that players could connect with friends and 'catch 'em all'.





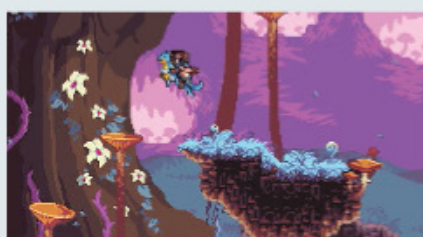
**FAR LEFT:** Train your Temtem pals to fight in double battles and become the ultimate Temtem tamer.

## LEARN 'EM ALL *More games to enjoy*



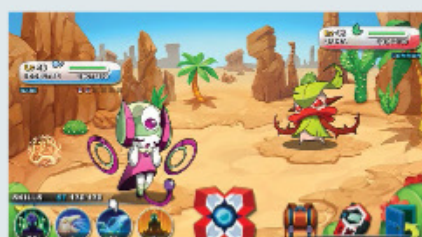
### SIRALIM ULTIMATE

*Dragon Quest* meets *Path of Exile*. Crawl through blocky dungeons, fuse monsters, and decorate your castle.



### MONSTER SANCTUARY

*Monster Sanctuary* incorporates the concept of *Pokémon* into a unique sidescrolling RPG.



### NEXOMON

The Nexolord has kidnapped your friend Ellie, and now it's up to you to tame monsters and save your friend.



### DISC CREATURES

Humans live in harmony with Disc Monsters. Not actually as much like *Pokémon* as it seems.

One of *Stardew Valley*'s greatest strengths is its community. Barone regularly posted development blogs and kept an open dialogue with followers. *Temtem* community manager Lucia Prieto says the team's relationship with its community is one reason for its current success: developers have even started making community-suggested improvements.

Even smaller monster-taming games like *Siralim Ultimate* credit community for their success. "I don't think many developers are as lucky as I am to have so many players who are as effective at communicating their ideas and providing feedback," says its developer, Zach Bertok.

### DON'T COPY THAT HOPPIP

*Stardew Valley* is *Harvest Moon* for the PC crowd, but it's far more than just a copy. It has its own unique features: deeper character customisation, same-sex relationships, and, er, the ability to make mayonaisse.

Some monster-taming games stick closer to the *Pokémon* formula than others. *Coromon* resembles the GBA *Pokémon* games where the new kid in town (or, in this case, the new adult) arrives as the guest of honour and receives a free monster pal as a gift from a professor. In *Temtem*, the child protagonist follows the same goal of becoming a Temtem master. But *Temtem*, like *Stardew*, also has multiplayer.

"There's this whole social, MMO factor to it that's shiny and exciting," says Prieto. "This in itself already changes a lot of the core elements of the genre, but we

built upon that. Combat is always in pairs, and there's no RNG whatsoever during battles... battles are challenging to a degree we think users don't expect."

The best 'clones' take their inspirations as a base and build something distinct. That's part of why Denis Sinner, the managing director of Moi Rai Games, chose to make *Monster Sanctuary* part monster taming and part *Metroidvania*. Sinner also felt *Pokémon* didn't have enough stakes or strategy, so his team focused on giving players more choice, "I tried to make *Monster Sanctuary* feel like you are rewarded if you come up with synergetic monster skill builds or monster team compositions," he says. "Every monster having a full individual skill tree is what gives players a lot of strategy options."

Monster taming games have a tough road. Each one needs to somehow escape *Pokémon*'s shadow or at least grow within it. Developers have found moderate success with supportive communities and unique features, but that hasn't been enough to produce a smash hit. Jochem and Marcel say content creators still derogatorily refer to monster-taming indies as 'Poké-clones' or 'Pokémon rip-offs', but they're still optimistic.

"Now that more and more indie monster-tamer games are popping up, all with their own unique spin, more and more people seem to be taking on a different opinion on non-*Pokémon* monster-tamer games," they say. We might never narrow down the actual reason why no monster-taming clone has taken off like *Stardew Valley*. That doesn't mean there never will be one, though. ■

Jessica Reyes

## GAMES LIKE SIRALIM ULTIMATE CREDIT COMMUNITY FOR THEIR SUCCESS



# Secret Level

THE UNSUNG HEROES OF DEVELOPMENT

## ASK AN UXPERT

Sprung Studios CEO **JAMES CHAYTOR** on UI, UX, and why they're so important

**J**ames Chaytor and his teams have worked on *Apex Legends*, *The Elder Scrolls Online*, multiple *Call of Duty* titles, *Microsoft Flight Simulator* and far more than could ever be listed here. Yet Chaytor's story begins before Sprung Studios; even before his videogame work. UI and UX are important elsewhere, too.

After working his way up to creative director in a web marketing firm in the late 1990s, he began consulting with the mobile company Three, who at the time had just rolled out 3G. Chaytor helped the firm with the challenge of making new kinds of content usable on small devices. It was at this point that he founded Sprung Studios, and expanded its services to more clients. But by 2009, the recession had hit budgets hard and companies were pulling together teams for this work.

Chaytor moved Sprung's focus to games, via a small team who had been laid off from Disney Interactive. These developers had a console background, and needed Chaytor's help to make a game equally visible and playable on a small screen. That game was *CSR Racing*... which went on to feature in the 2012 Apple keynote, and make about \$12,000,000 a month. This propelled Chaytor into the wider game industry with a bang.

A common misconception is that UI and UX are interchangeable terms. They're not. "The way I always explain this," says Chaytor, "[is that] UX is how something works, and UI is how something looks. When you're working with UX, you're not trying to think about the theme of the game ...

the questions you're asking are: 'Can I understand this menu system? Are the buttons in the right place?'"

### HEADS UP

That said, the lines between UI and UX can blur, as one often informs the design of the other. While Chaytor and his teams at Sprung are now experts in this design, they back up their work with research, to ensure that everything they're designing is working as it should. This research can turn up the occasional surprise.

One piece of research was a simple survey, which included a question asking where players would go in the menu to turn on subtitles. "It was surprising that people were spread

between three options. It was very interesting to me that some people went to audio as a place to find subtitles. It makes sense when you think about it. [These short surveys] really cut down on a lot of the little mistakes that might persist through to a final product."

Sprung will ordinarily have 7-14 people working on a game, and they're all similarly trained. While some in the industry specialise in UI or UX, this goes against Chaytor's design philosophy. "I don't believe in separating those roles," he explains. "When you're working on UI, you *have* to have an understanding of UX in order to do it. There are so many tiny decisions all through the UX period of the game, because you start with flows, then you have wireframes.

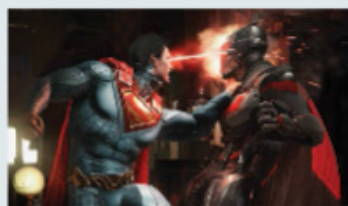
"So we have the UX UI designers, but we also have other areas of UX UI that are so hugely important, like motion. Motion will help to instil certain emotions in the player. You might find that you feel more excited when the UI comes to life to present you with a new card that you've just got or a character you've upgraded."

The industry has made great strides in accessibility and people like Chaytor and his teams are vital to this. "We still find ourselves reminding our clients," he says, "that if you're going to use colour to define different statuses, you also need to have a symbol so that people who have difficulty seeing colour or are colour-blind would be able to see the difference between those cards". It's a keen reminder that if developers want their games to be for everyone, then UI and UX will have to be assigned the importance they deserve. ■

**Luke Kemp**

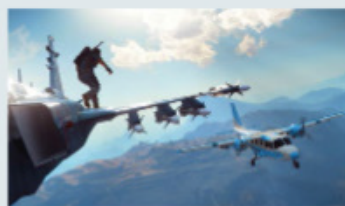
### SPRUNG ON YOU

*Examples of Sprung Studios' handiwork*



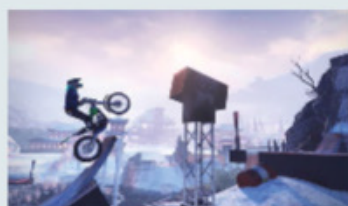
#### INJUSTICE 2

All those unlockable bits and bobs needed a good team to make navigating the menus easy.



#### JUST CAUSE 3

Thankfully, Rico's careless attitude to getting the job done didn't translate to the UI and UX.



#### TRIALS RISING

Guess who you have to thank for UI navigation not being one of the trials that you need to fight here?



#### CALL OF DUTY VANGUARD

Good UI and UX is essential to the flow of a fast-paced shooter like your average *Call of Duty*.



“UX IS HOW SOMETHING WORKS, AND UI IS HOW SOMETHING LOOKS”



**TOP:** RTS games, even ones as relatively user friendly as *Halo Wars 1 & 2*, demand great UI.

**ABOVE:** Note how the highlighting makes it clear which icon you're looking at.

**FAR LEFT:** The number of characters may have increased significantly, but *Apex Legends* remains smooth to navigate.



## 1 month



### A PLAGUE TALE: REQUIEM

**RELEASE** October 18 | **DEVELOPER** Asobo Studio

Amicia and her brother Hugo return for another medieval journey through rat-infested lands as they try to find a new life for themselves.



### GOTHAM KNIGHTS

**RELEASE** October 25 | **DEVELOPER** Warner Bros Games Montreal

Batman is dead, and it's up to a team of his former sidekicks and allies – Nightwing, Batgirl, Robin and Red Hood – to keep order across Gotham City in this co-op action-RPG.



### CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

**RELEASE** October 28 | **DEVELOPER** Infinity Ward

No, not the one from 2009. Or the remaster of that game from 2020. This new sequel in the rebooted series is... well, it's this year's *Call of Duty*.

## 3 months



### COMPANY OF HEROES 3

**RELEASE** November 17 | **DEVELOPER** Relic Entertainment

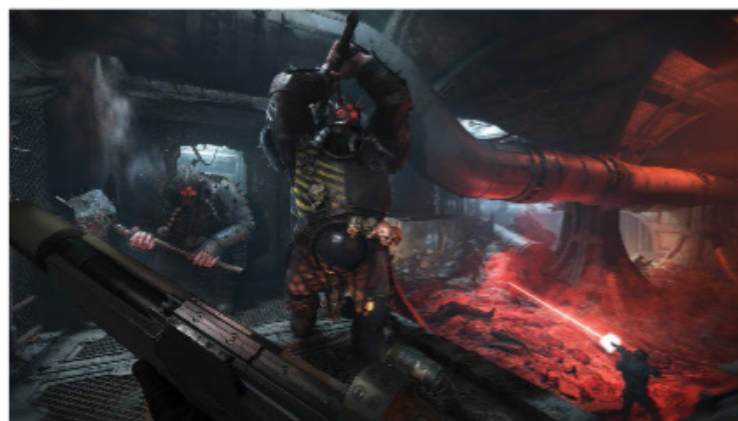
Explosive WWII action that seems poised to revive not only the series, but the whole RTS genre. Our hands-on previews have us convinced this is going to be a blinder.



### EVIL WEST

**RELEASE** November 22 | **DEVELOPER** Flying Wild Hog

We should've banned developers from using the 'something West' name format years ago. Unrelated to *Hard West*, *Weird West*, *West of Loathing*, or *West of Dead*.



### WARHAMMER 40,000: DARKTIDE

**RELEASE** September 13 | **DEVELOPER** Fatshark

Battle through the grim darkness of the far future with three of your mates, and some very big guns, while the cult of a diseased Chaos god swarms to stop you.



# 6 months



## FORSPOKEN

**RELEASE** January 24 | **DEVELOPER** Luminous Productions

A modern day New Yorker is transported to a fantasy realm, where her new magical powers come with the small catch that she has to save the world.



## DELIVER US MARS

**RELEASE** February 2, 2023 | **DEVELOPER** KeokeN Interactive

An atmospheric and perilous adventure across the surface of the red planet, as you journey to discover what became of missing colony ships.



## RESIDENT EVIL 4

**RELEASE** March 24, 2023 | **DEVELOPER** Capcom

A ground-up remake of the classic original that promises more tension and bigger scares to go with its updated graphics, story and controls.

# 12 months+



## STARFIELD

**RELEASE** 2023 | **DEVELOPER** Bethesda Game Studios

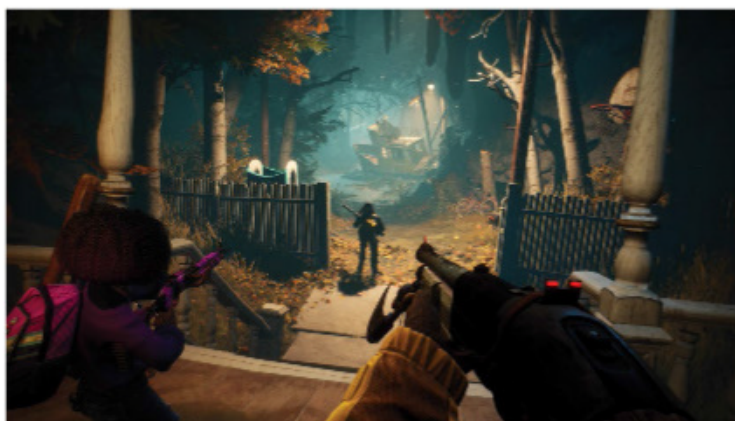
It sure has been a while since Bethesda last released a new single-player RPG – but if ‘Skyrim in space’ can pull off its grand ambitions, it’ll be worth the wait.



## SUICIDE SQUAD: KILL THE JUSTICE LEAGUE

**RELEASE** 2023 | **DEVELOPER** Rocksteady Studios

The long-awaited follow-up to the *Batman: Arkham* series, starring Harley Quinn and other super-villains forced to fight evil versions of Superman, The Flash and more.



## REDFALL

**RELEASE** 2023 | **DEVELOPER** Arkane Austin

The team behind *Prey* brings us a co-op, open-world FPS about a team of vampire hunters, each with their own supernatural powers.

**DELAYED**

## RESET THE CLOCK

*Midnight Suns* has been delayed to an unspecified date in 2023. The team says it's "to ensure we are delivering the best possible experience for our fans", calling it "the biggest game we've ever made".







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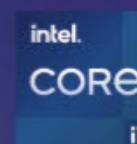


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## NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE  
TBCDEVELOPER  
DambusterPUBLISHER  
Deep SilverLINK  
[deadisland.deepsilver.com](http://deadisland.deepsilver.com)

## DEAD ISLAND 2

Back from the grave... again.  
With a vengeance

**I**t's all too easy to compare the continued existence of *Dead Island 2* to the zombies it features. Lurching on for years, long after it seemed dead, passed from one studio to another. In spite of the name though, *Dead Island 2* is practically a new game. According to David Stenton, when development was taken over by Dambuster in 2018 it was "built from scratch". The only thing they kept was zombies and its LA setting. "That serves the 'paradise gone to hell' pillar." Though the genre in which it sits feel like it never dies, with zombie games still releasing on the regular. What does something like *Dead Island 2* bring to the table? What even is the identity of this series?

Speaking to Stenton and James Worrall at Dambuster, as well as having 20 minutes with the game, it's clear the focus is squarely on its gnarly close quarters combat. "It was the passion for the gore, the passion for up close melee combat," Stenton explains. "And just doing that really, really well." The section of the game I played had our player character, Amy (one of six heroes for players to choose) having to venture onto the well-known Santa Monica Pier. It was a tight, linear portion in which the bright lights and amusements rides are slowly brought back on as we delve deeper, which made for a poor showcase of how the game's ambitions as an open world will fare but a good showing for the game's moment to moment fighting.

It's a spooky section, more atmospheric and subdued than the

bombastic trailer might have you believe. A faint mist hangs over the city's too-damn-quiet beach, letting the red ferris wheel blaze away in the night with real foreboding. It's a very handsome looking game. "It's easy for us to build a place that people can feel is familiar," James says of the game's setting. "That then gives us that contrast with the zomb-pocalypse. It also means, they know wherever they go. Even if they've never been to Bel-Air before they know what Bel-Air looks like." The tone in *Dead Island 2* lands somewhere closer to Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* series. Scary things are scary or at least grotesque while our heroes are a little larger than life, confronting horror with bravado and one liners. Amy kept shouting and swearing at zombies, goading them the way I often find myself doing.

## BEACH AND CLEAR

While Worrall explains there is no branching narrative, the character you choose will bring their own personality to what happens. "Each player character has their own voice and their own dialogue. So you might get one character who's particularly driven or energised or upbeat. You might get another character who's a little bit more of a cynical individual.

Some characters are quiet low key, subtle. We've written those characters to reflect broad playstyles." You strong, quiet types should get a little representation I'm sure. These heroes all come with their own starting stats and abilities so you'll be able to mould any of them more or less to your preferred style of zombie killing meaning a choice can largely hinge on a matching personality.

Your player characters is far from an invulnerable hero after all and all the quips in the world do little once the undead shuffle onto the scene. There's a real sense of claustrophobia as zombies gather around you since they can't be taken care of swiftly. Each individual one is a threat in its own right. In these moments the game conjures up memories of *Resident Evil 4*, making split second decisions about how to handle a group of foes. Take out a leg here, try for a headshot there. Except instead of guns, you're mostly wielding over the top melee

PLAYED  
IT

**"EACH PLAYER CHARACTER  
HAS THEIR OWN VOICE AND  
THEIR OWN DIALOGUE"**



*Dead Island 2*

» weapons, wrestling them back as they get stuck or embedded in rotting flesh.

**A REAL EYE GORE**

All that is thanks to a system for rendering zombie bodies called FLESH that stands for Fully Locational Evisceration System for Humanoids. It took a decade to create the perfect acronym but by god, they've done it. What it means is that much like the recent *Resident Evil Remakes*, zombies have an absolutely disgusting level of detail as you hack or shoot at them. It's gross and grimy, the kind of excess that makes you feel like you need a shower after playing.

Perversely, I couldn't get enough. I'm a sucker for these intimate fights and *Dead Island 2* has more in common with games like *Chivalry* than it does other zombie slayers. You have more than just a heavy and light attack to use and your defensive and special attacks can be swapped out, if say you'd rather have a block than a dash. There's of stats swapping too but that feels considerably less exciting. It's not earth shattering, it's just done really well and the focus on precision, actually having to aim your pokes and swings to hit specific body parts, sets it apart.

If that was it that would probably be enough but *Dead Island 2* heightens the chaos of these skirmishes with loads of interactive scenery. Sure, there's your typical explosive tanks but the game has a fluid simulation for water and fuel. The interplay of elements, is simple enough. Water conducts electricity, fuel spreads fire... you get the idea. What was cool was it feeling more dynamic than simply me remembering to bring the right resources to every fight. Having an electrified zombie wander into a crowded fight was initially a moment of panic until inspiration struck and throwing some water at their feet turned them into a weapon against all their surrounding buddies. "Ultimately, when you're the full-on zombie slayer later in the game, what you're really relying on is sort of a combat symphony," says Stenton.

**CLOWNING AROUND**

This demo ends with a boss encounter, a confrontation with a zombie clown who

has been taunting us as we explored the pier. In a fight like this, essentially one on one, it goes from a zombie game to a more well-worn action RPG. There are phases and windows of opportunity as the clown's arms can block ranged attacks. It highlights the combat's complexity, as well as its surprising difficulty. You have a lot of moves and abilities are put at your disposal. It just comes at the expense of the situational complexity of fending off a crowd of brain eaters. It feels a lot less, and I appreciate the irony here, alive.

The presence of friends will probably help as three player co-op is confirmed for the game, however no other details were shared at this time. It's not hard to imagine how it could come together, with players specialising in different roles and abilities, bringing some RPG staple tactics to the zombie genre. With some pals in the mix, *Dead Island 2* could be a perfect game for late night sessions.

**ARMY OF THE DEAD**

Co-op is just another aspect among many that isn't unique to *Dead Island 2*. There is *Back 4 Blood*, *Left 4 Dead* and even *Vermintide* or *Darktide* among numerous others. We've had zany and comedic zombie games, including ones people love a whole lot like *Dead Rising*. Even LA itself has been done before in many games. *Dead Island 2* is far from novel and any hope of twists or a compelling narrative lay beyond the scope of the demo I played but still, there's certainly something intriguing in it. It presents the zombie apocalypse as something its characters are forced to live with. Its heroes are, I'm told, immune but infected, carrying the disease without turning into zombies themselves. Meaning leaving quarantined LA isn't an option. Unable to escape, our heroes are chasing momentary joys in a bleak, broken world as they fight for their lives. That might be a bit relatable to a whole bunch of people right now.

I had little to no expectations or even much interest in *Dead Island 2*. A sequel to a mediocre RPG? Yet another zombie game? While it absolutely lacks for originality, it excels in some of its execution. There's no knowing if it has an enthralling campaign to tie it all together but in its fights, the game kills and for some, great combat could be more than enough to keep an eye on this unexpected comeback.

*Samantha Greer*



**DEAD ISLAND 2 COULD BE  
A PERFECT GAME FOR  
LATE NIGHT SESSIONS**





**ABOVE:** *Dead Island 2* recreates famous LA locations, but will it make a compelling open world?

**LEFT:** There was little story in the demo, but the premise is hardly inspiring.





## NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE  
2023DEVELOPER  
Blackbird InteractivePUBLISHER  
Gearbox PublishingLINK  
[gearboxpublishing.com](http://gearboxpublishing.com)

## HOMEWORLD 3

Even in space, you need to use terrain to your advantage

**I**t's the third mission of the game, and, if this was *Homeworld 2*, I'd be screwed. Right now, I only have access to recon ships and interceptors – basic fighters that, per *Homeworld's* rock, paper, scissors design, are weak against the bigger, meaner frigates. And I've been tasked with securing an area protected by two bigger, meaner frigates.

But I'm not playing *Homeworld 2*. I'm playing its successor, a game that Blackbird Interactive describes as being 20 years in the making. A game that takes concepts once considered back then, but dismissed because the technology of the day just wasn't up to the task. I'm playing *Homeworld 3*, a space RTS that's all about terrain.

Those frigates are guarding a small segment of a colossal, derelict ship, which acts as the battlespace for this mission. Blackbird is keen to point out that the environmental artistry that *Homeworld* is known for – the grandeur of space, its asteroid fields and derelict ships, is no longer just part of the skybox. It's now an active part of each mission.

"Terrain was a huge feature that was not able to be done at the time with the technology that was available for *Homeworld 2*," says game director Lance Mueller, "and that was part of the original vision. There was a lot of concept art brought over from *Homeworld 2* that we used to find the foundation."

This is good news for me, and bad news for the two enemy frigates, who are

guarding a section of the map that's littered with panels that have broken off the derelict ship. By right-clicking on a section of this debris, my interceptors will fly up and take cover. If the missile frigates can't get line-of-sight on my ships, they're safe to continue their approach.

## SECRET TUNNEL

And so I continue, moving closer until finally I'm in range. But rather than send my visible but covered squad into a close range suicide attack, I instead unleash my second surprise. While the frigates have been attempting to get a lock on my squad of well-protected interceptors, my main squad was hiding underneath – in a tunnel running through what would have been the derelict ship's engines.

Tunnels like this provide a route between two points that block line-of-sight, meaning they're perfect for flanking manoeuvres and ambushes. My squad surprises the frigates as they fire pointlessly at a target they can't hit. I take some losses – they're still just interceptors – but come out far better off than I would've in open space.

"The convenient cover in mission three is to set up the hard counters and soft counters of the game," says Mueller. "Terrain is supposed to be more of a creator of soft counters. In previous *Homeworlds*, if you brought a bunch of fighters against a bunch of frigates, there's nothing to stop them from just launching all of their weapons at you. Now you're able to move your fighters and use the terrain and get on top of something, which now means you've increased that time to kill, so that you don't die before you get there."

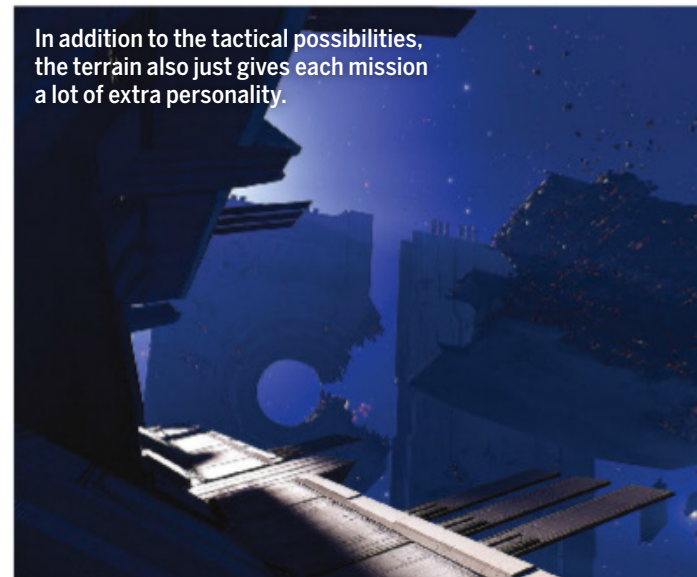
The irony of *Homeworld 3* is that it does feel like a Relic RTS – a more modern one from the post-*Company of Heroes* era. The use of terrain gives it a strong flavour of modern RTS design, even while it retains the design philosophy – and the vibes – that built its legacy as a cult classic of the genre. I'm eager to see how these elements play out in a more organic way, in a mission where they aren't being so clearly tutorialised to the player. But if done right, *Homeworld 3* should be a meaningful progression of the series – one that almost justifies that 20 year wait.

Phil Savage

## THOSE FRIGATES ARE GUARDING A SEGMENT OF A COLOSSAL, DERELICT SHIP



In addition to the tactical possibilities, the terrain also just gives each mission a lot of extra personality.







**ABOVE:** That's some good-looking space combat.

**LEFT:** Clever tactics can subvert the rock, paper, scissors nature of the combat.





## PREVIEW

### *The Callisto Protocol*

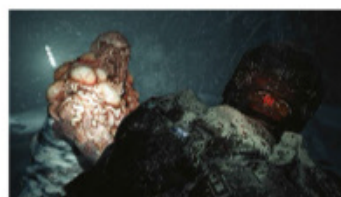


**ABOVE:** They may look like zombies – but the mutants are still intelligent.

**RIGHT:** When was the last time this place saw a mop?







## NEED TO KNOW

**RELEASE**  
December 2

**DEVELOPER**  
Striking Distance Studios

**PUBLISHER**  
KRAFTON

**LINK**  
[callisto.sds.com](http://callisto.sds.com)

# THE CALLISTO PROTOCOL

A gloriously gory spiritual successor to *Dead Space*

**F**ive seconds into my demo of *The Callisto Protocol* and I'm already slapped with a (very successful) jump scare. A mutant appears from nowhere, tentacles brutally ripping out of its chest as it lets out a blood-curdling scream. Protagonist Jacob hesitates, and the tentacles slosh back into its body. But that's no sign of safety. It morphs, in an unsettlingly believable way, growing larger, badder, and a whole lot scarier.

Developer Striking Distance want to keep you on your toes. The team pulled inspiration from *Alien Isolation*'s stalking antagonist to ensure you almost never feel safe. "Things track you in our game, the grunts sometimes find a way," chief technical officer Mark James tells me. "They don't always attack you, they'll move into a grate and you'll hear them around you, and they'll pop up in another grate somewhere else where there's a better attack spot for them. So they're looking for spaces in which they can actually make the jump happen, rather than just attacking."

It generates a lot of tension, and that's noticeable throughout our demonstration. When Jacob strikes a mutant with his stun baton, he feels panicked and desperate, not like a triumphant action hero.

## DEAD GOOD

He can also stomp on his foes in a way very reminiscent of *Dead Space*. It makes sense, with Glen Schofield being the original creator of that series and the lead

on this one. James tells me there's "a lot more characterisation, a lot more story" to be found here though, and it appears to be true. Jacob mutters to himself and reacts to the environment around him, verbalising my own anxieties as he goes.

It surprised me, then, to see him lift a mutant into the air with a superpowered wrist grip and toss him into a crusher like a limp noodle. All of the frightened tentacle bashing in the run up to this suddenly felt a little unnecessary when there was the potential for him dispatch a mutant like he was binning a banana peel. Striking Distance has done its best to ensure that powers don't automatically turn the game into easy mode, though.

All weapons have branching upgrades that are created and attached with 3D printers dotted around Callisto's prison. A maxed-out power grip can be a great way to quickly get out of combat situations, but it's not something that can be relied upon constantly. The mutant humans aren't punching bags that can be easily cheesed – they learn. Hit a big guy with the baton enough times and they'll start to stand defensively, arms crossed in front of them to block oncoming attacks.

They'll protect limbs or other parts of the body where the virus is taking hold. "We've got these intelligent moments," James told me. "That was one of the things we really focused on early on, the idea of intelligent opponents and adaptable opponents."

Not only are the opponents intelligent, they're also frighteningly grounded in reality and the prison environment around them. "They're not zombies, they're not aliens, they are mutated humans," James says. "We look at how the body mutates naturally." Even when there's an unhinged jaw, tentacles, or boils blistering along the body, the game does a surprisingly good job of reminding you that these people were once the prisoners and guards that walked Callisto's halls.

As the gameplay demo wraps up, Jacob is thrust down terrifyingly fast pipes, fans whirring at an ungodly speed. He avoids them for a little while, before getting clipped, pushed against the wall, and split in half by the blades. I'm not much of a horror fan, but even I leave this gory display keen to see more.

*Mollie Taylor*

## THE MUTANT HUMANS AREN'T PUNCHING BAGS THAT CAN BE EASILY CHEESED – THEY LEARN

Inmates at a maximum security prison on Jupiter's moon are turning into mutated monsters.



## Jagged Alliance 3



## NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE  
TBCDEVELOPER  
Haemimont GamesPUBLISHER  
THQ NordicLINK  
[jaggedalliance.com](http://jaggedalliance.com)

## JAGGED ALLIANCE 3

Escaping the spectre of *XCOM* by never telling you the odds

**I**t's hard to overstate just how important Firaxis' *XCOM* reboot was. In the years since its release, the turn-based strategy genre has experienced a renaissance that owe a huge debt to Firaxis' clever mix of old and new. But what if you're trying to make the successor to a different turn-based classic? Then, it seems, *XCOM*'s legacy can be a hindrance.

"We found that, no matter what we did, everyone played just like they played all the other games like *XCOM*," says Brad Logston, senior producer for *Jagged Alliance 3*. "They weren't playing it like *Jagged Alliance*. We didn't even know how to fix it. We were doing things like tweaking AI, tweaking weapon damage ranges, all these different things. Nothing was really working."

The solution may seem small, but it's had an oversized effect on how the game plays. "One of our combat systems designers proposed, 'You know, this may be crazy – and people are gonna kill us – but what if we just remove chance-to-hit and see how that works.' Once we did, everything shifted. Before, if someone had a 75% chance shot, they wouldn't take it. They'd hold back. Once we removed chance-to-hit, they start experimenting. It also meant we could make the AI more fluid. They could try things, they could be a little sloppy during play."

Some of my favourite turn-based games of this new era are ones that give the player an overabundance of information – like *Into the Breach* or

*Invisible, Inc.* But here, Haemimont Games has discovered something that gets to the essence of what made the early *Jagged Alliance*'s mix of turn-based combat and RPG-lite management so good. These are not games about responding perfectly to the situation – they're about adapting to the unexpected.

"It's not just chance-to-hit," says Logston. "Even things like weapon jam chance, or grenade fumble chance are hidden. I've had situations where I've been on the second story of a building, fumbled a grenade, and blown up the floor beneath me. All the mercs fell down one floor, took fall damage and were stunned for a turn."

## HEAVY RAIN

The *Jagged Alliance* series has reemerged a few times in the last couple of decades, but never in a way that did justice to the spirit and depth of the first two games. But here, it feels like Haemimont wants to get it right. Its African setting features extreme weather effects that will change the combat simulation – in the jungle, during heavy rain, visibility is lowered, but so too is sound, giving your mercs an opportunity to exploit.

Its roster of 40 mercs are all fully voiced, with personalities that may clash against each other. The strategy layer is classic *Jagged Alliance*: a dynamic map that tracks and simulates both the missions you deploy your mercs on, and the enemy force's attempts to retake what was once theirs.

But the real sign of Haemimont's commitment is that one seemingly small decision to upend the conventions that *XCOM* laid down. It would have been easy to make another *XCOM*-like, but it wouldn't have been *Jagged Alliance*.

"Where we had it before, it was just *XCOM*," says Logston. "And we were like, 'Well, are we just cloning what someone else has already done?' That doesn't make us special. We had to find how to bring that *Jagged Alliance* experience back."

Perhaps the bigger question then, is whether people want a departure from the systems that have come to define the genre. Is there a place for *Jagged Alliance* in this turn-based renaissance? As someone who loved the borderline chaos of those early games, I really hope there is.

*Phil Savage*



The setting certainly feels true to classic *Jagged Alliance* so far.

**IN THE JUNGLE, DURING HEAVY RAIN, VISIBILITY IS LOWERED, BUT SO TOO IS SOUND**





**ABOVE:** Build a mercenary crew of colourful characters from around the world.

**LEFT:** Intel discovered in missions can point you towards new opportunities and sidequests.





A familiar world  
but in an oddly  
different art style.

## NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE  
2023

DEVELOPER  
Mojang Studios

PUBLISHER  
Xbox Game Studios

LINK  
[minecraft.net](https://minecraft.net)

# MINECRAFT LEGENDS

A strategy spin-off that gives  
*Minecraft* a whole new scale

**T**his is a strange one – I'm not totally convinced by *Minecraft Legends* yet. Perhaps it's the odd cel-shaded art style, or my own inexperience with strategy games. It's very obviously *Minecraft*, but at the same time feels quite a bit alien – like a sort of genre uncanny valley.

NEW  
INFO

It's not as if the series has struggled to contort itself to genres outside of survival before. *Minecraft Dungeons* did reasonably well for itself, even if it didn't work for me, and I had a great time with Telltale's narrative-driven *Minecraft Story Mode*. Perhaps it's because I'm watching someone playing rather than navigating it myself, but it's hard to get a feel for how it'll work as a strategy game.

Where standard *Minecraft* thinks block by block, *Legends* zooms out, thinking in chunks or 'thoughts' as I'm repeatedly told during the demo. Gathering wood isn't done by slowly punching down trees, but



by sending out small flying minions who're capable of deforesting entire areas in minutes. Journeying across the procedurally generated map doesn't have to be meticulously performed with one-block jumps and careful climbing. Instead, I watch as the main character, mounted on a horse, practically levitates up entire blocks on a mountain to get a better view of the piglin fortress he's about to launch an attack upon.

## ATTACK THE BLOCK

Suddenly, a giant tower gets erected on top of the vantage point. Various spawners are placed down with speed, featuring recognisable mobs like golems ready to send into battle. While *Minecraft Legends* forgoes some creativity in

removing the ability to create grand structures block by block, I'm told much of the expression comes instead in your placement of these pre-defined buildings, slowly creating grand fortresses of your own to compete against the piglin armies.

The piglin fortress I'm shown is one of many that'll be encountered throughout the campaign, called hordes. This one, the horde of the bastion, focuses on a strong defence. As the hero's own base is being built and troops spawned, the bastion is being scoured for an entry point. One is found, and battle begins.

I'm still struggling to grapple with the soup of ideas and tweaked art style, but I can't help but find myself drawn in by the *Minecraft*yness of it all. It's still got that goofy charm, and I'm told the focus is on trying to make this game feel like a fairytale, which I can see a glimpse of during this preview. If there's anything that'll get me into strategy, it'll be *Minecraft*. I'm dying to see a little bit more in the hopes it'll put my uncertainties to rest. Maybe this could be the start of a beautiful relationship with the genre.

*Mollie Taylor*

## SUDDENLY, A GIANT TOWER GETS ERECTED ON TOP OF THE VANTAGE POINT



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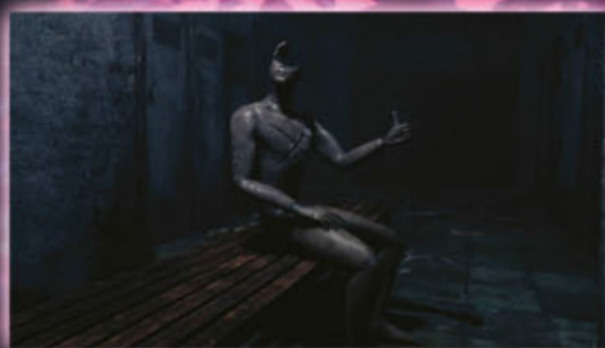
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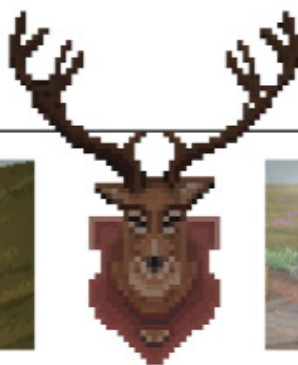
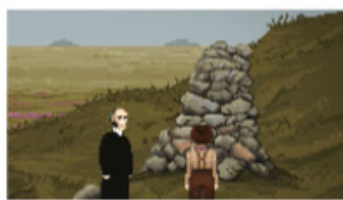
We Create Stuff

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## PREVIEW

### *The Excavation of Hob's Barrow*



#### NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE  
2022

DEVELOPER  
Cloak and Dagger Games

PUBLISHER  
Wadjet Eye Games

LINK  
[cadgames.weebly.com](http://cadgames.weebly.com)

## THE EXCAVATION OF HOB'S BARROW

Eldritch goings on in this folk-horror adventure

**W**here is Leonard Shoulder? Is that even his real name? Will I run into Roderick Elbow and Kneel Legjoint as well? Whose is the fresh grave in the churchyard? Will I ever be able to buy a cake? And what is this goblin-like creature doing talking about saving my father?

I have questions by the time I get to the end of a demo of *The Excavation of Hob's Barrow*, the game formerly known as *Incantamentum* from point and click specialist Cloak and Dagger Games.

You are Thomasina Bateman, whose parents probably wanted a boy, and you are writing a book about the burial mounds of England. Invited to the Yorkshire village of Bewlay – home of England's most remote railway station – by the mysterious Mr Shoulder to excavate the local Hob's Barrow, you rock up at the local inn and, naturally, begin interrogating the locals.

Shockingly, not all is as it seems. No one wants to talk about the barrow, only to say there are 'stories' surrounding it, and you get the feeling you're being lied to, or at least that information is being withheld. In this unspecified period of Victoriana there are steam trains but not yet telephones, and Stanley the enlightened barman is happy to serve a young woman pints of ale despite it being legal to refuse women service at bars until 1982.

The demo contains around the first third of the game, just enough to set the scene, deepen the mysteries and prove

that the barrow really does exist, even if Mr Shoulder may not. And in the demo at least, you won't actually excavate Hob's Barrow. We suspect that may come later.

The whole thing, from stray cats going bump in the night to disappearing postmen on horseback to dolls buried in the middle of fairy rings, reeks of the sort of thing Mark Gatiss might make a BBC4 documentary about. The setting, out on the blasted moors of northern England, recalls *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. There's talk of an isolated manor house (from which a pale heroine with great hair must surely make her escape, possibly after setting it on fire), of a ruined chapel straight from *Blood on Satan's Claw*, plus hints of *Royston Vasey* and *Summerisle*.

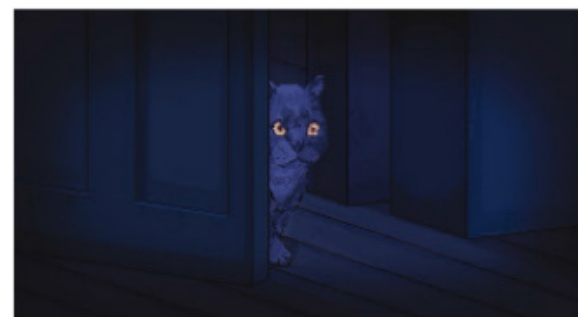
#### BLOCK HORROR

There's probably a debate to be had about how effective this kind of coarse, pixel-art style is when played with your nose mere inches away from a 28in, 4K screen. It's all very well for providing atmosphere, and allowing the game to run on a 700MHz Pentium, if the minimum requirements on Steam are to be believed, but while there are scaling options in the settings there are noticeable moments when Thomasina is smooth, and others when she is blocky, depending on her distance from the camera.

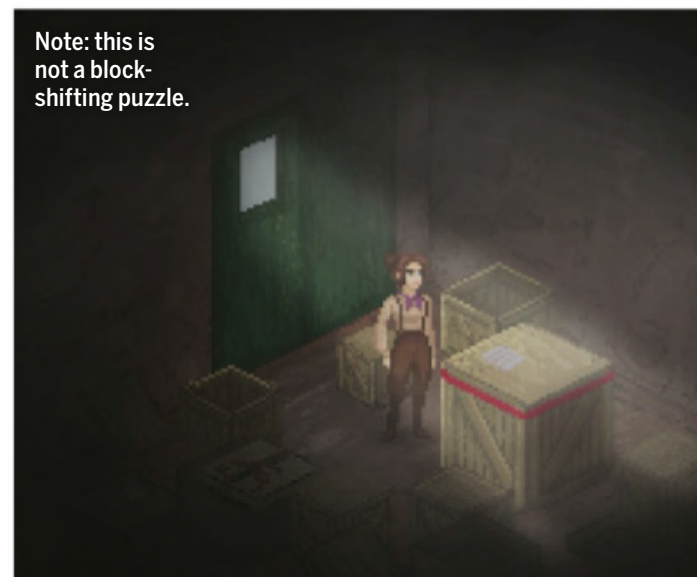
The game is fully voiced, though some samples are missing from the demo and others appear to play in the wrong order. There are some sublime northern British accents on offer, from the drunken station master to the long-suffering barman, and the feeling you get when you pop into the Slaughtered Lamb Inn and everything goes silent is palpable. This is underlined by the score, a barely there accumulation of noises that often appears to be sounding an alarm quietly in the background.

It all plays out with the usual adventure game too-ing and fro-ing, fetching things for characters in exchange for information, starting arguments in the inn, cutting a vicar with broken glass, climbing down a hole and meeting an angry badger. You know the sort of thing. An urgent thread of mystery tugs you onward, trowel firmly in hand. A firm release date would be good to unearth.

*Ian Evenden*



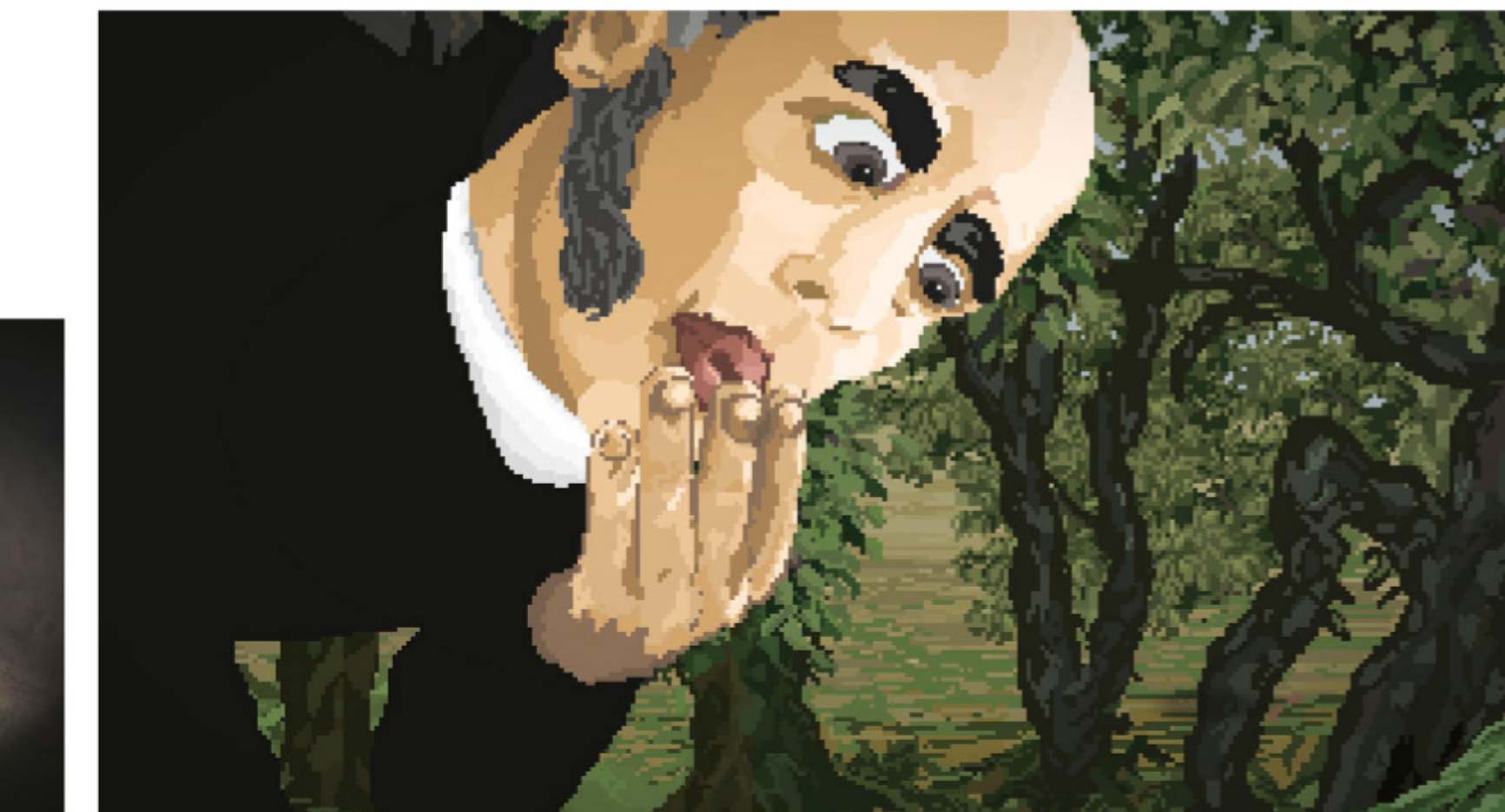
Note: this is not a block-shifting puzzle.



## YOU ARE THOMASINA BATEMAN, WHOSE PARENTS PROBABLY WANTED A BOY



*The Excavation of Hob's Barrow*

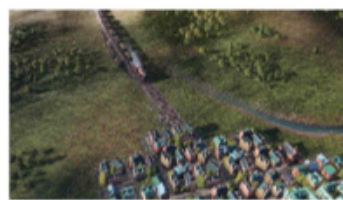


**ABOVE:** A woman in trousers! Ye gods!

**LEFT:** More tea vicar?



## Victoria 3



## NEED TO KNOW

**RELEASE**  
October 26

**DEVELOPER**  
Paradox

**PUBLISHER**  
In-house

**LINK**  
[paradoxinteractive.com](http://paradoxinteractive.com)

## VICTORIA 3

Creating utopias and dystopias by gaslight

**T**he year is 1881 and I've turned the islands of Hawaii into an anarchist paradise that long ago disposed of the king. Our industries are modest, but they are all owned by the workers, giving us one of the highest standards of living in the world. For the most part, we did this without firing a shot.

*Victoria 3* is, even more than its 2011 predecessor, a grand strategy game about shaping a society. Covering the years from 1836 to 1936 on a detailed world map, it models every single individual person alive at the time. That might sound absurd, but it's not an exaggeration. They're organised by culture, religion, and profession into groups called 'pops' that all get their own 3D portraits, but when you see that there are 4,361 Anglo-Canadian Protestant Machinists in Saskatchewan, that's not an abstracted figure. The Clausewitz engine is keeping track of all of those people, from their birth rate to literacy level to political preferences.

If characters are the core of *Crusader Kings III*, pops are the core of *Victoria 3*. Not only do you need them to plough your fields, fight your wars, and work in your textile mills, they exert their influence on the political balance of your nation. At least, the educated ones do. And as the 1800s roll on, more and more of the lower and middle classes will become politically active. You can certainly try to slow that down by passing draconian censorship laws and making schools only available to

the wealthy, but as a certain Romanov learned in real life, you hold back the tide of history at your own peril.

Working with or against the popular will to build your ideal society is one major half of the central gameplay. Early on, most countries are controlled by powerful landowners who exert the lion's share of the influence by simply having the most money. There are multiple sources of political clout, but even in a pure democracy, cold hard cash will always be one factor. There is a lot you can do to nudge things in a more egalitarian direction, perhaps starting with extending the vote to all landowners, then to the heads of households, then to all adult men and eventually to women. Moving people out of the fields and into the factories changes the equation, too. This will slowly erode the power of the old aristocracy. But they will fight these laws every step of the way to preserve their interests, and they may even start a civil war if you try to pass too many reforms too quickly. And their every economic loss is often a gain for the rising capitalist tycoons.

PLAYED  
IT

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

In this way, the main antagonists you have to struggle with are often within your own borders. Of the five or six campaigns I played, in only one did I get majorly involved in foreign wars. And it's perfectly possible to avoid international entanglements and still have an exciting run full of drama, conflict, and intrigue. I have often tried to play Paradox's other games without going to war, but *Victoria 3* seems specifically built for it. When you try to pass a law, like establishing public schools, everyone who doesn't like the change will try to stall it. And if they're fed up enough, perhaps because you also made them start paying for a national health system and set up a minimum wage, they might attempt to violently overthrow the government.

The strength of such a revolt is based on how much power the opposition still holds, so there's a delicate dance of sneaking through moderate reforms that will gradually weaken the old guard before you push for anything more drastic. Trying to go straight from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary republic in 1836 is a recipe for disaster. But if instead you start



**MORE OF THE LOWER AND MIDDLE CLASSES WILL BECOME POLITICALLY ACTIVE**







# PREVIEW

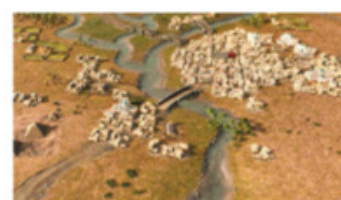
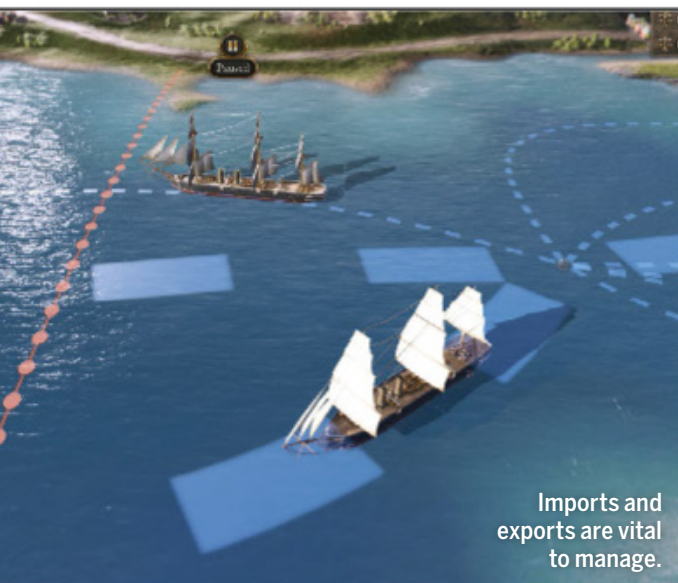
## Victoria 3

**RIGHT:** It's not about painting the map your colour in this one.

**BELOW:** Warfare is pretty simple and abstract compared to economy and politics.







by abolishing levies, setting up a standing army, and allowing propertied men to elect representatives who at least nominally serve at the pleasure of the king, their base of power can die a death by a thousand cuts, eventually rendering their protests mostly toothless.

Certain types of pops are more likely to support certain interest groups, such as aristocrats mostly throwing in their lot with the landowners, and each interest group has a set of traits that determine which policies they support and oppose. A paternalistic interest group, for instance, scoffs at the idea of women being equal to men and prefers a strong guiding hand on the tiller of government. These preferences can also be influenced by characters, as well. Every interest group has a leader with an ideology of their own. The trade unions may start out relatively moderate, but as new ideas spread within your borders, they may come to be led by a socialist or a feminist leader pushing for more radical changes. It's certainly possible to try and keep a very conservative monarchy until the endgame, but it becomes increasingly harder to do as more people become literate and distant universities spread ideas like egalitarianism and anarchism.

## WORKSHOPS OF THE WORLD

The other reason it's a hindrance to stay rooted in the past is that you'll fall behind in the second major arena of *Victoria 3*: the Industrial Revolution. As your campaign opens, most people in the world are illiterate peasant farmers working in subsistence agriculture. It's a state of affairs that pleases and benefits the aristocracy, but leaves little room to grow your economy with the many inventions that will come about in the next 100 years.

Taking advantage of these modern marvels will require you to build schools and universities, teaching your peasants how to become machinists and engineers, as well as building coal mines, steel mills, and shipyards. There are dozens of basic, luxury, and industrial goods that all have dynamic prices based on supply and demand within your country's market, which may include multiple sovereign states via a customs union. Producing or

importing more of any given resource lowers the price, which will also improve the standard of living for all of your pops as they can afford more on the same salary. More supply also makes your domestic industries producing those goods less profitable though, which may lead to the workers in certain factories becoming poorer or being laid off.

At the beginning, only the very wealthy will expect to have nice things like wine and luxury furniture. But as the lower classes become more literate, and especially if they hear about this new craze called socialism, the minimum standard of living they expect to maintain will continue to rise. A factory labourer in 1920 might be significantly richer than his great-great-grandfather who was a farmhand in 1840, but he won't be content with his lot in life as he's read enough to understand how the system is rigged in favour of the rich, which may lead him to become a radical and demand reforms like a minimum wage or workplace safety regulations. The industrialists who own the factories will oppose this. It's a very direct way of modelling the causes of class conflict, and one that ultimately works better and feels more authentic than *Victoria 2*'s abstract 'consciousness' system.

## DRUMS OF WAR

That isn't to say you can't play this as a conquest-heavy map-painting game. It's just not the default. And war plays out much differently than in other grand strategy games, as you don't actually move units around manually. Rather, you assign generals to fronts, and give them an order to attack, defend, or stand by. The war will then play out mostly on auto-pilot, with most of your ability to influence things driven by keeping your arms industries churning, inventing new methods of warfare like aerial reconnaissance and early tanks, and reforming your army to better meet your needs. It's definitely not the strongest plank of *Victoria 3*, but it does the job.

Overall, *Victoria 3* is breathtakingly ambitious and not quite like anything that came before it. There are some places where it becomes cumbersome due to the complexity of the simulation, particularly when it comes to the economy. But I could hardly drag myself away to do anything else for the ten days I got to play it, and I look forward to many more revolutions to come when it releases on October 26.

Leana Hafer



AT THE BEGINNING, ONLY THE VERY WEALTHY WILL EXPECT TO HAVE NICE THINGS



## PREVIEW

### *You Suck at Parking*

Keeping your head while everyone else loses theirs.

#### NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE  
2022

DEVELOPER  
Happy Volcano

PUBLISHER  
In-house

LINK  
[yousuckatparking.cc](https://yousuckatparking.cc)

## YOU SUCK AT PARKING

A driving game where your objective is to stop

**I**'m not great at parking in real life, because I'm paranoid about hitting other cars. Here is a game where you'd fail your parallel parking test because a giant magnet threw you into a laser barrier, or the sea, which isn't something I've had to worry my insurers with. Yet.

*You Suck at Parking* is a simple blend of isometric racer and, well, parking, but not as you know it. Drive your tiny but clearly overpowered car round a treacherous *Trackmania*-style circuit of obstacles against the clock and with dwindling amounts of petrol, before trying to leave your car in the general vicinity of the marked bays.

Handling much like a fairground bumper car, each turn is likely to become a doughnut spin, but critically there's no reverse gear at the end of it. The catch here is, once you stop, you've parked and that's it. That run is over. Never mind,



your next car is just a quick reset away. Just don't hit your old wreck on this fresh run. Eventually time catches up with you, and the game gets to declare that you rock or, more likely, actually suck at parking some cars.

#### SQUEE POINT TURN

Even if you're confounded by one track, you're encouraged on to the next one, so you never really feel stuck on anything. There are always more tracks, more spaces, more mines, more giant fans and house-sized boxing gloves to challenge you. You will have to circle back eventually to complete the levels if you want to progress to the next hub-island, but that never felt unfair or arduous. Instead, I spent most of the game

giggling or swearing happily at the same things depending on how many times I'd tried to do them. I even figured out the magnets eventually. The biggest challenge was using consistent controls to steer a car that constantly changes direction, like the fastest RC car you've ever tried. I wouldn't have minded a scheme where left was always left, but maybe that would be too easy.

This being a beta build, the multiplayer is, as yet, deserted, but it's clear they're hoping for the chaotic and sharable fun of *Fall Guys* and its ilk. There are hats and custom explosions, for one thing. You get a little view on this with the 'Frogger' level and those with other non-player cars busily getting in your way, before flinging themselves, lemming-like, to their deaths. In singleplayer, you can push your own car out of an occupied parking space by accident, and I imagine that's where most of the fun/griefing will be had in the arena. I suspect it'll all be too frantic to be a good spectator sport, but time will tell. Maybe I just suck at parking.

**Matt Killeen**

PLAYED  
IT



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# PREVIEW ROUNDUP

By Samantha Greer



FIRST  
LOOK

## WYRDSONG

A mysterious new RPG with serious pedigree

RELEASE  
TBC

DEVELOPER  
Something Wicked Games

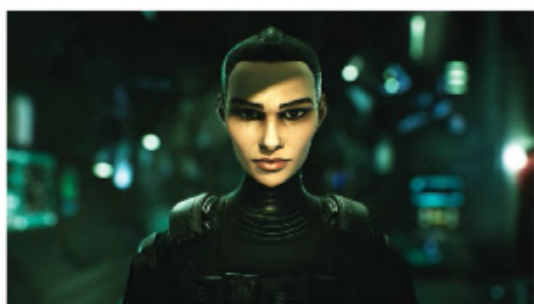
PUBLISHER  
In-house

LINK  
[bit.ly/3Q5iKeu](https://bit.ly/3Q5iKeu)

**T**his open world RPG comes from former Bethesda and Obsidian developers, veterans of *Skyrim* and *New Vegas*. While there's little to go on save an

animated trailer, we know it's set in a "fictionalised medieval Portugal". Studio founder Jeff Gardiner says the game was inspired by a trip to the country just before the COVID pandemic, and cites

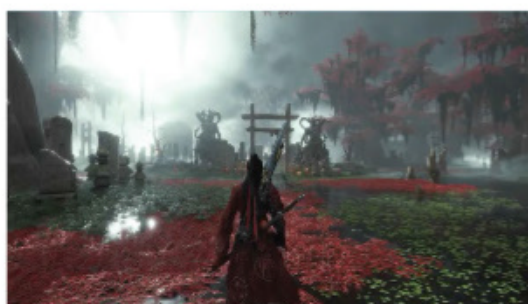
everything from alternate history fiction to *Elden Ring* as an influence. We'll have a while to wait before we see the results of that mix, however, as the game is still in early pre-production at this stage.



## The Expanse

RELEASE Summer 2023 | DEV Telltale Games, Deck Nine

**O**ur favourite badass pansexual polyamorous space pirate is coming to videogame land thanks to this Telltale prequel series, which will explore Camina Drummer's life before the events of sci-fi TV series *The Expanse*. Getting actress Cara Gee involved is exciting since her performance is so much of what people love about the character, but also casting you as a desperate scavenger, poking around spooky derelicts, sounds great on its own. Deck Nine has done well in recent years with *Life Is Strange: Before The Storm* and *True Colours*, here's hoping this is another winner.



## Where Winds Meet

RELEASED TBC | DEV Everstone

**T**his gorgeous Chinese open world action game takes cues from Wuxia cinema like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, though I also see shades of Zhang Yimou's *Shadow*. That means players will employ martial arts with a hint of supernatural powers, including running gracefully across water or gliding through the air. It's a genre basically untouched in videogames, so *Where Winds Meet* feels like it's been a long time coming. It's not all action though: the developers say that you'll be able to learn trades like medicine and practice as a doctor, if you'd prefer to lead a peaceful life.

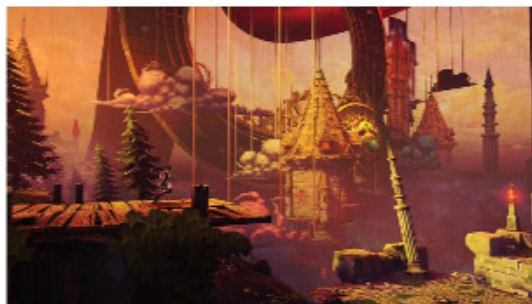


## Rift of the Necrodancer

RELEASED TBC | DEV Brace Yourself Games, Tic Toc Games

**A**fter the delightful *Crypt of the Necrodancer* and *Cadence of Hyrule*, developer Brace Yourself is now back with a new rhythm game. This one takes the action to a modern setting, and while there's still the promise of it being an RPG battler, it's presented in more traditional rhythm game form than the dungeon crawling format that defined *Crypt*, with a *Guitar Hero*-like scrolling road of notes to hit. It certainly still boasts the easy charm and catchy music of its predecessors, and mini-games including rhythm-based yoga look like they'll inject plenty of silly fun.





## Phantom Hellcat

RELEASE TBC | DEV Ironbird Creations

While it's stylistically distinct (though equally colourful), favouring pop beats in an otherworldly opera house, this 2D-3D hybrid action game reminds me of the outlandish *El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron*. Switching perspectives, altering the scenery. The game treats its world like a stage to be decorated as befits the scene. You play as Jolene, armed with a sword, hellbent on rescuing her mother from a supernatural theatre. It's a fun premise but there's tough competition in the character action genre – here's hoping this contender can hold its own.



## The Great War: Western Front

RELEASE 2023 | DEV Petroglyph Games

This RTS puts players in command of either the Allied Nations or Central Powers as they battle over Europe during the First World War. Play time is split between turn-based decision-making and real-time fights, with battlefields deteriorating the more they're fought over and weather playing a major role. It comes from the developer of the well-received *Command & Conquer Remastered*, and even features music from C&C original composer Frank Klepacki. Though, er, I'd imagine this'll have a rather more serious tone than that series.



## Lies of P

RELEASE 2023 | DEV Neowiz Games, Round 8 Studio

It's hard to see past the pitch of 'gritty Pinocchio by way of *Bloodborne*', especially when the influence of From Software's game is so obvious in motion. Yet, to its credit, there's certainly some imagination on display in its steampunk machine enemies, heavy metal puppets who spray thick oil in place of red gore. The boy himself isn't made of wood, he just has a mechanical arm, but a talking lantern appears to be a hint of Jiminy Cricket, who in spite of the grim setting is as chirpy as ever. *Lies of P* is a bizarre mix, but I can't deny it looks super slick in action.

# WARHAMMER 40,000: ROGUE TRADER

This is a real turn for the Matt Allwright series

With CRPGs in a renaissance over the last few years, there couldn't be a better time for Warhammer 40K to enter the genre. You're cast as the titular rogue trader, a merchant given special dispensation to forge out into the galaxy in search of profit and adventure. As you go, you'll build an eclectic party, including a Space Marine and an Aeldari Ranger, so you should get a real taste of the universe while you chat and fight your way across it. In the grim darkness of the far future, there is only war... and dialogue choices.

NEW  
INFO



RELEASE  
TBC

DEVELOPER  
Owlcat Games

PUBLISHER  
In-house

LINK  
[bit.ly/3qdMBHn](https://bit.ly/3qdMBHn)



### *Camp Canyonwood*

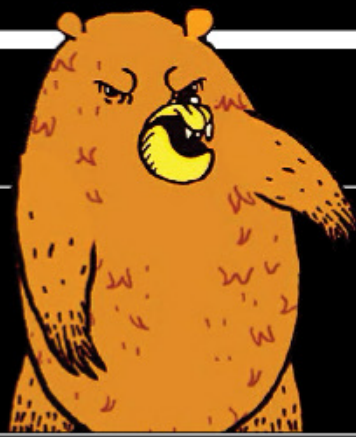


**ABOVE:** Singing songs around the campfire is a must.

**RIGHT:** Jack might be nightmarish, but his services can help you out.







## NEED TO KNOW

**EXPECT TO PAY**  
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**DEVELOPER**  
Deli Interactive LLC

**PUBLISHER**  
Graffiti Games

**LINK**  
[graffitigames.com](http://graffitigames.com)

# CAMP CANYONWOOD

Make sure your kids have fun in this management game

**E**very summer I tell myself that this is the year I'll get out more and maybe touch some grass in interesting places, and yet every summer I run out of time and feel that slight melancholy of not meeting expectations. Thankfully *Camp Canyonwood* has hit Early Access and I can experience the (hopeful) joys of endless summers until I've finally met my wilderness goals.

You play as a new camp counsellor who has been brought in to work on a rotting campsite and look after a group of children by making sure they have fun so you can get paid at the end of it. Teach them to fish, catch bugs and forage so they can earn badges and hopefully leave your camp a good review. As you progress you'll be able to upgrade tents into cabins and decorate the area to improve your ratings. However, camping in the woods isn't that easy – there are bees, bears and UFO abductions to deal with.

## NATURE CALLS

It's all very cute with a gently sinister *Don't Starve* vibe. It's all about managing the campers by directing them to do different activities and slowly building up your surroundings by adding things like fences to make things safer or statues to make it prettier. Each kid left in your care has their own interests to cater to and you'll have to work hard to keep them entertained as well as safe. There's a lot to keep track of, like making sure the children have something to eat and also that they're not

being eaten by mosquitoes or anything worse.

The camp itself is set in a forest filled with insects and creatures. You'll often spot butterflies, snails, squirrels and raccoons scurrying around on your hikes in the wilderness. Small lakes bordered by pines make for enticing fishing spots and if you're feeling adventurous you'll find a desert to the south of the camp full of minerals to collect. But it's not all fresh air and pretty waterfalls, there are also venomous snakes that will send your campers into a panic and a rather austere Area 51-like fenced off area at the bottom of the map. You can take your charges out on nighttime strolls to gaze at the stars if you like, but if you see strange lights in the sky and one of your kids gets abducted their parents won't want to pay you for your time, no matter if they were having fun up until that point.

Unfortunately it's not exactly clear what you're supposed to do with your time, so I spent the first few days of camp ushering the kids around while they complained constantly about how bored they were. Eventually I got so annoyed by them I disbanded the group and left them to their own devices. It turns out that's exactly what you should be doing so the kids can have some freedom away from boring grown-ups. However, just like real children, they can be little shits. If you leave them alone they'll start bullying each other or hurt themselves – you need to strike a balance between keeping them close and out of trouble, and letting them roam.

Also just like real kids, they are constantly under your feet. Interacting with the thing you want can be tough if one of your urchins stands right next to it – I want to go in this door, not speak to you about your utterly stupid hobbies Neville, GO AWAY! Directing one nipper to do a specific thing, like chop wood, can also be tricky as often another child will wander over and enter your circle of influence to do the task instead. Hopefully it'll be easier to direct them by the time the full release comes out.

## TOP MARKS

To get a good review (and a nice stockpile of cash) at the end of summer you'll need to help the sprogs earn badges like a

PLAYED IT



Why do all the other counsellors get huts while I only get a sleeping bag?



## THE CAMP ITSELF IS SET IN A FOREST FILLED WITH INSECTS AND CREATURES



## Camp Canyonwood



proper little Scout. Some are easy to earn like foraging or hiking which you'll earn by walking around and directing them to plants to pick at. You can also give them tools to get them to chop wood, fish or mine rocks, but the camp is in such a sorry state that you'll have to buy them the tools to do so first. They'll pick things up on their own, like trash, and also do things like make friendship bracelets (also like trash) so you'll have to check in with them often to take useful materials from them and make sure they've packed a bit of grilled fish or fruit to munch on when their energy drops.

Each of the activities involves holding down an interaction button down which currently feels rather simplistic. The internet loves a good fishing minigame, but there's nothing like that here to keep gameplay feeling varied, instead you'll have your hands full just keeping an eye on the kids. Hopefully that's something that will change with further development time. Luckily there's still plenty to discover just from walking around and there are hints to a greater mystery involving the previous camp counsellor to be found on your travels.

### DAILY ROUTINE

Eventually I fell into a rhythm of waking the campers up with a morning bugle call followed by foraging for fish or berries for breakfast. A daily hike is a good way to earn badges and then letting them roam until one of them inevitably ends up starting a fight with another one and needs to be picked up to calm them down. Eventually it's time for stories by the fire, followed by a terrifying nightly ritual of being visited by a skeleton in a suit called Jack. Just like real camp! Thankfully this one only looks scary and actually offers a very useful trade service to help you expand your inventory.

It also took me until day six to realise that I could sell things to make a little extra cash by bringing them to a dingy camper van in the desert area below the campsite – something that will make the first week much easier. I also have no idea what most of the materials you stumble across are for. There are a lot of flower and rock varieties as well as mysterious things like

ghost ectoplasm to be found. Some things you can trade in to the other counsellors to unlock more upgrade options, but I have absolutely no idea if I should be holding onto everything I find to use later or if it's safe to sell.

The buying, trading and selling aspect of the game also needs some work. Finding resources to unlock new amenities makes sense, but at the moment it just amounts to basic fetch quests – collect logs to unlock access to more tools, pick of trash to get bigger tents – there's no sense of gathering things to help actually build the camp. Being able to customise the site is one of the main draws for a game like this, but it feels like such slow going to unlock what you need to get to that point.

You can buy things from the other counsellors, such as marshmallows for evenings at the fireside from Pam the cook, and plasters from the nurse, but you can't sell anything to them to make life easier – only Hooper in the desert will buy anything from you. A few tweaks to make selling things easier and pointers to help understand what each item is worth would go a long way. Leaving players to discover things for themselves is fine for bigger story mysteries, but it is terribly frustrating for basic mechanics.

### HAPPY CAMPERS

It's still very Early Access – there's not much variety in what you can do and a few bugs left me stuck in a lake or in a doorway. The opening week is also a real slog so a bit of refinement there to give more pointers on how to get your campers to have fun would go a long way. While there might not be a lot here right now, there are plans for new biomes, weather events, cooking and decorating updates and better inter-camper relationships. There's already a strong foundation here so it's easy to see ahead to how those updates will build up to something with real potential.

There's a lot of promise here – the setting and characters are delightful, and each of the kids you take under your wing are wonderfully weird. I can't get enough of watching them waddle through the forest getting into trouble. They're annoying, picky and hilarious, and you'll want nothing but the best for the wee scamps by the end of summer. Much like the camp itself, things may be a bit barebones now, but there's still plenty of fun to be had while roughing it.

*Daniella Lucas*



Wick is in charge of tools and building.

## A DAILY HIKE IS A GOOD WAY TO EARN BADGES AND THEN LET THE KIDS ROAM





**ABOVE:** Camp upgrades take a while to earn.

**LEFT:** Thanks for the warning.





Backpack Hero



FLOOR:2 EXPERIENCE: 9 / 50

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SCRATCH

NEED TO KNOW

EXPECT TO PAY  
£13.50

DEVELOPER  
Jaspel

PUBLISHER  
Jaspel, IndieArk

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BACKPACK HERO

Go a-sidescrolling, your knapsack on your back

**S**uch is the need for a unique selling point in games, that even the most onerous housekeeping can become a key mechanic. *Backpack Hero* is an inventory management roguelike, a genre-blend that risks giving me flashbacks to panicked shuffling of vodka and the wrong ammo in *STALKER*.

*Backpack Hero* sees you take on one of three charming animal characters with a magical rucksack, a wooden sword, plated salad, and makeshift shield, ready for a scrolling 2D adventure. The look and feel recall an ill-defined bygone era of DOS boot-drives, and the retro atmosphere is total, down to the music and audio. This will either delight you, annoy you, or give you an eerie feeling that your dad is going to want to watch the news on the family TV and make you turn the game off. Oh, the nostalgia.

The combat is basic turn-based whacking, but the strategy behind it lies in your choice of loadout, and the necessary compromises you make beforehand. Each victory drops random loot which you can equip, critically limited by what you can fit in your slowly expanding titular backpack.

You can pull in items to buff your existing weapons and armour, or gamble on a change from brute force to magic, or back. You need to shift stuff around to get the most out of it, with all the satisfaction of clearing lines in *Tetris*. Sometimes you're hoping to come across a vital modifying article later, and all the while watching the energy your items consume

YOU CAN PULL IN ITEMS TO BUFF YOUR EXISTING WEAPONS AND ARMOUR

in combat. A powerful weapon may be simply too draining to use, whereas a series of little knives that you can use once per turn for free might prove more effective, leaving you energy points to spend on defence. Some come with practical issues. The nunchucks need room to swing, for example, so unless you leave space around them in your pack they result in self-inflicted damage. Then you'll find yourself weakening your combat so you can pick up a healing item, as giant snails fill your inventory with awkward curses, and you desperately try to both reach a healer, and collect enough gold to pay them.

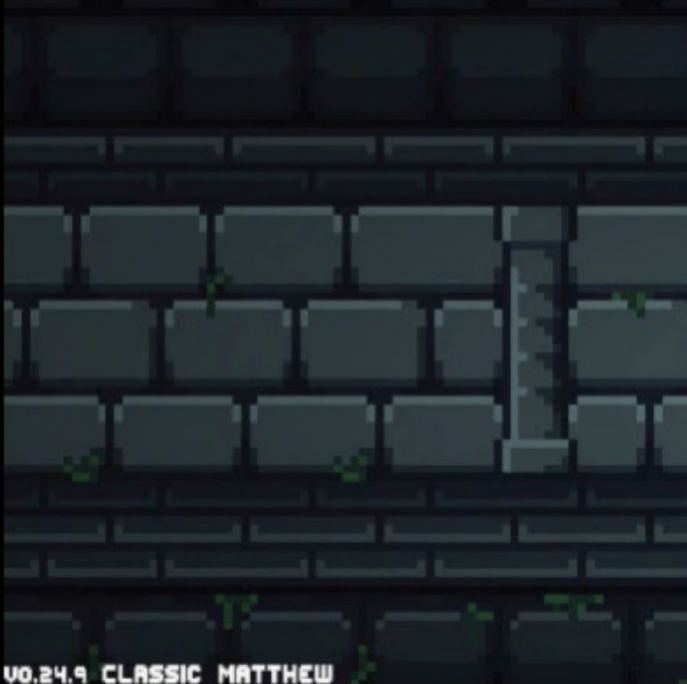
**SAC MAGIQUE, AIDEZ-NOUS**  
For a game in Early Access, *Backpack Hero* feels pretty complete. The odd menu quirk or minor glitch doesn't affect the functionality, and I took the sudden difficulty curve peaks as proof of my incompetence, rather than a balancing issue. The different characters have different skills, and there's a range of difficulty modes and challenges. Finally for both the purist and the dilettante, you can toggle perma-death on and off.

The current save system is a bit punitive – there is an autosave, but it's confoundingly random – and save scumming can leave you perpetually ill-equipped for a tough enemy, giving you no choice but to begin again. But that's OK. In some ways, pushing through those starter dungeons is tedious, and a little more choice in the early game's dungeons and enemies would be welcome, but the loot changes each time, and the loot is what *Backpack Hero* is all about. Based on the competence and slickness of the build thus far, we can reasonably believe things will get even better.

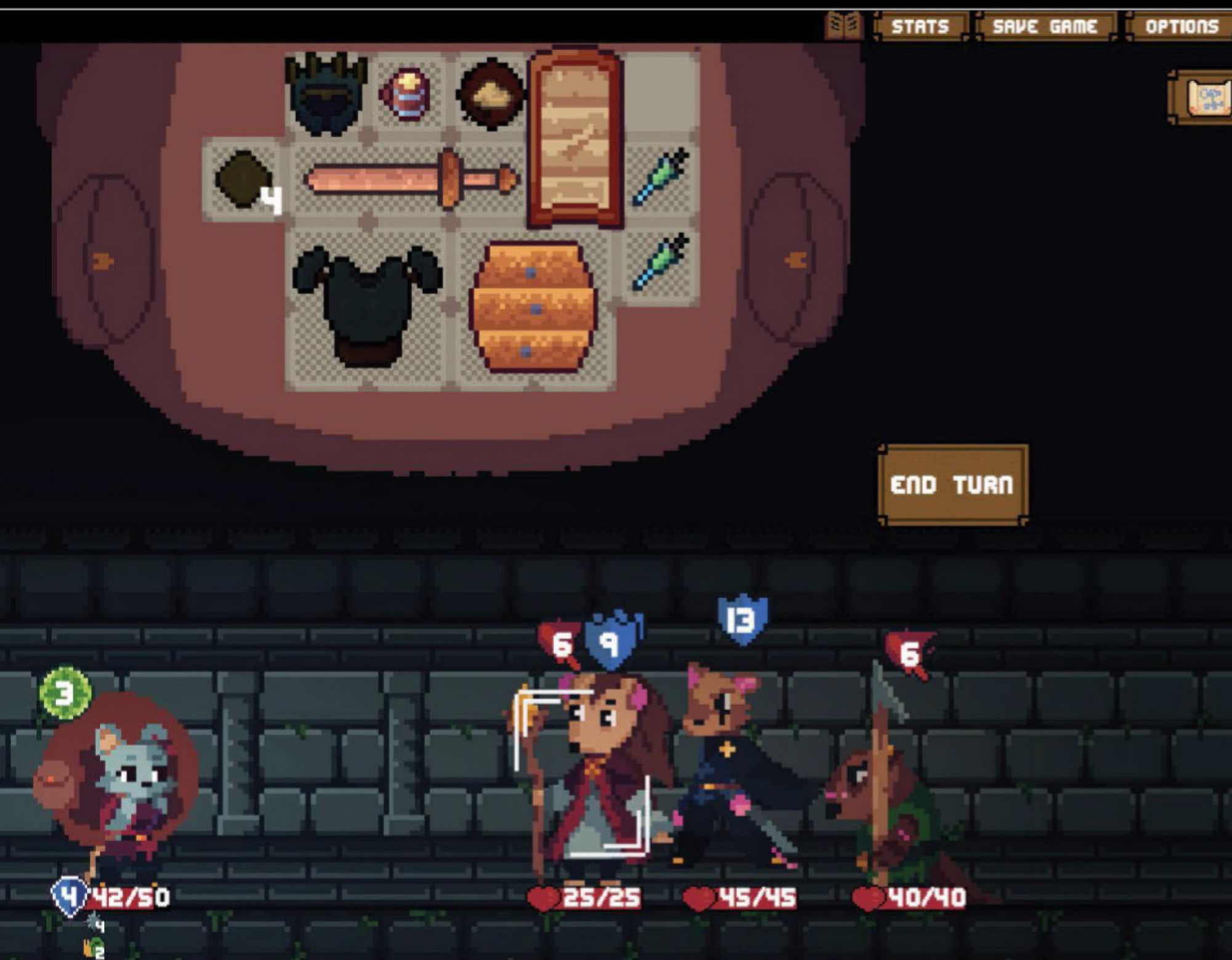
*Backpack Hero* is an appealing slice of retro-rogueing, with gentle text dialogue reminiscent of the quirky translation we all enjoyed back in the day. It may not be anything truly new or world changing and it's unlikely to become an obsession. However, it's ripe for a quick half-hour of PC gaming, that you invariably notice has become three hours as you reset and try again, only with more fish, cacti, and piggy banks this time around.

Matt Killeen

PLAYED IT







ABOVE: Getting tough.

LEFT: Bag related names are the rule.





## COVER FEATURE

*Moonbreaker*





# MINI BREAKS

**MOONBREAKER**

feels pure tabletop,  
but on your PC

*By Fraser Brown*



## Moonbreaker



ideogames owe a lot to their tabletop counterparts, especially when it comes to turn-based

strategy and tactics. But one of the best parts of fielding armies of little warriors often gets overlooked in the digital realm: model painting. *Moonbreaker*, from Subnautica studio Unknown Worlds, has rectified this frequent omission and then some, giving us something that feels pure tabletop on your PC.

*Moonbreaker* is a sci-fi-fantasy tactics romp in which you build a crew of unique characters, paint them just like you would real miniatures, summon them into 12-minute battles, and try to defeat the opposing crew's captain. Your goal is simple, then, but beyond that is a whole lot of complexity, drawing from sources as diverse as Warhammer, the board game Cosmic Encounter, and Magic: The Gathering. And the moment you look at it, you'll know you're staring at a tabletop game. The way units move like they're being picked up off the board, and the way the terrain looks like something built for a Warhammer 40k tournament – it's unmistakable.

"We wanted to make something new," says Unknown Worlds co-founder Charlie Cleveland. "We're Unknown Worlds, we like to try crazy stuff. Maybe not that crazy. But we try to push things forward and keep things fresh. We're making the

world's best digital miniatures game. We want to take the miniatures hobby and keep what is amazing about it, which is like all the analogue part of it, the imagination part of it, the tactile, physical nature of it. But we want to remove all the other barriers, which are like this giant investment you have to make in money, time, rules, physical setup – all that stuff. We just want to remove all that. We're trying to streamline and make more accessible the entire tabletop hobby, not just the game, but the hobby itself."

The streamlining, in this case, is more about cutting out the faff. As well as the obvious stuff like not needing to spend £100 on some miniatures or schedule a day of warfare with a friend, there's the aforementioned sole objective and short match times, as well as things like the removal of range limits, so a unit can attack an enemy all the way on the other side of the map. Within all these streamlined systems are wrinkles, however. So while ranged characters can attack anyone, regardless of where they are, all the cover and obstacles peppering the battlefield reduces the accuracy of the shot. Sure, you can theoretically hit that distant target, but you're going to need a lot of luck. Your foe can use this knowledge to their advantage by securing their captain in a trickier-to-hit spot, or by blocking the captain with other units.

## GROW UP

Battles don't play out like your typical tactics game, where you start



ABOVE: I do not like the look of that tongue.

at full-strength and every turn threatens to weaken you. First you create your roster, with a single captain and ten crew "kind of Guardians of the Galaxy or Firefly style," says Cleveland. But you don't get access to your full roster when the battle begins. Instead, you get a randomised selection, which can be called down from your orbiting ship. "So the pace builds up. It's not war, and it's not attrition. It's like you're building up, maybe like *StarCraft*, or traditional videogame pacing, where it escalates."

The ship plays a role, too. At the beginning of a match, you'll get a couple of ship assists, picked from a larger pool, giving you access to things like healing through the Medical Recall ability, or the Vortex Beam, which pulls allies and enemies alike towards a specific point. These can also synergise nicely with your units' abilities. If you're playing with one that grows more powerful with each attack, for instance, you can use the Medical Recall assist to take them out of the







**"WE'RE UNKNOWN WORLDS, WE LIKE TO TRY CRAZY STUFF. MAYBE NOT THAT CRAZY. BUT WE TRY TO PUSH THINGS FORWARD"**

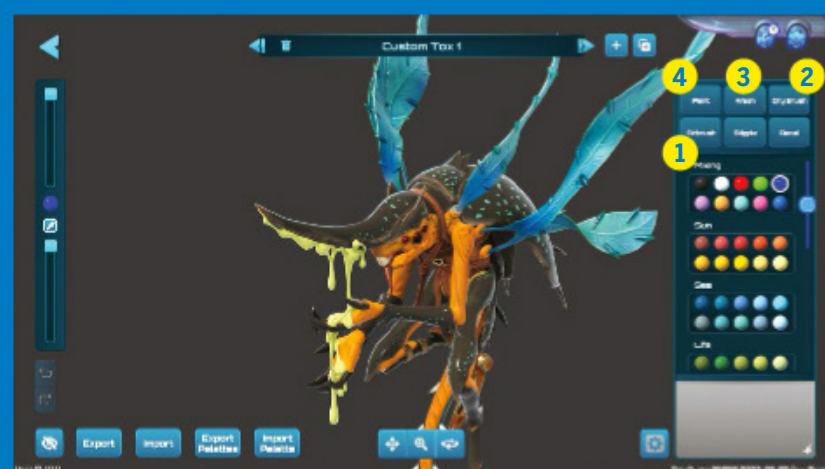
fight, heal them up and then plonk them back down with all their stats intact, allowing you to ensure they keep growing and growing.

Active abilities cost Cinder, Moonbreaker's magical resource, which is harvested from the cores of moons. Bringing in units also costs Cinder. Passive abilities just happen

in the background and cost nothing, but typically have prerequisites. With Cinder being a limited resource, generating at one per turn, you might want to save them up for some big moves, like firing off a couple of abilities and bringing in another unit all in one turn. You can bank up to three for just such a

## ART SCHOOL

*Moonbreaker makes painting easy*



**1** The airbrush lets you apply colour.

**2** The dry brush gives you shading and highlights.

**3** Washes give your model more depth by emphasising the grooves and crevices.

**4** Paint mixing lets you create your own colour schemes.







**“EVERYTHING IN THIS GAME  
BASICALLY AFFECTS,  
WHENEVER POSSIBLE,  
BOTH SIDES”**



☒ situation. However! There will also be situations where having no Cinder is a boon. The Cornered ability, for example, gives +2 to attack and increases the distance the unit can travel, but only if you’ve run out of Cinder.

Every unit gets one ability, except captains, who boast three. Extillor, a hulking, heavily armoured captain from the Methedori culture – more on them in a bit – has the Justice passive ability, granting Hope to any allies in range when an enemy is defeated. Hope reduces damage by one, which could make the difference between life and death.

#### **USE RESPONSIBLY**

Hope is also one of Extillor’s active abilities, so he can pick a specific unit to buff, even if he’s not just defeated someone. The final ability, Valorous Blades, is a nasty spinning attack that damages all units in range. Note that both of these two abilities, unlike the passive, specify ‘units’ and not ‘enemies’ or ‘allies’. You’ll see that a lot in *Moonbreaker*,

whether it’s a healing ability or a more offensive one.

“Everything in this game basically affects, whenever possible, both sides,” Cleveland explains. “We want all abilities to be used in many, many different ways that we’ve never thought about. So we want to make sure that yes, it is possible to kill your own units. Sometimes you actually want to, I mean, it’s pretty rare, but it does happen.”

Before I’d even taken *Moonbreaker* for a spin myself, when I was just staring at Cleveland’s presentation, I was trying to come up with good crew loadouts and figure out which of the long list of abilities both bold and subtle would work well together. It tickles the part of my brain I use to create army lists in Warhammer or decks in card game Netrunner (RIP). You’ve got units who can fly and ignore all obstacles, flamethrower-wielding smugglers, an ability that heals your captain for every unspent Cinder, or more conventional healers, like the delightfully named Stitchy





McPatches, a robot who can spray units with lovely healing nutrients.

All of these characters belong to one of three cultures, with more coming in future seasons. But when you make your roster, you can mix and match – this isn't a culture war. The Methedori are Roman-inspired protectors, which I guess makes them stuffy space cops, and while that also means there's some

**ABOVE:** You can build a roster with any units, regardless of culture.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Weapons have infinite range, but watch out for cover.

aesthetic similarities with Warhammer 40K's Imperium, the Methedori are rather less fascist. Then there are the Smugglers, a rag-tag group of crooks and rebels, including some former Methedori characters. The final culture, the Cholek, have more spiritual leanings – though they certainly aren't pacifists – and an aesthetic inspired by Central American cultures.

### CULTURE CULTURE

There's a lot of variety within each culture, too. Making a Smuggler list doesn't mean restricting yourself to Han Solo and Malcolm Reynolds knock-offs. Instead you can recruit Toxoid, a grotesque, flying bug that's dripping with venom; Crankbait, with her hoverbike and mechanical hand/grappling chain, which lets her drag units towards her; and Chuck & Co, a guy riding a mech that mimics his movements, whose speciality is picking units up and throwing them.

All of these cultures exist within the Reaches, a system of tiny but habitable moons, inside which the precious Cinder resides. It blends sci-fi and fantasy, with characters using weapons both mechanical and mystical, and this extends to space itself, which is not a vacuum, allowing creatures and open-air ships to travel through it. "You can jump on a flying snake and go moon to moon," says Cleveland, which sounds like a dream holiday. It's evocative of the best D&D setting, Spelljammer, and was created by epic fantasy author Brandon Sanderson.

Given Sanderson's credentials as a prolific and popular fantasy novelist, it's surprising that *Moonbreaker* doesn't have a story-driven mode or a campaign.

"We tried making a story mode, and we spent way too much time on it," says Cleveland. "We may come back to it. But we basically decided the gameplay was suffering and the story was suffering." But the story and the universe Sanderson has created still comes to the fore via other methods – primarily through audio dramas.

"Every month, approximately, we'll release a new audio drama, which is an acted podcast that you can listen to in a game while you're painting, or out of the game on your phone," says Cleveland. "And you can hear the captains and their stories, and how they're all linked together. They're about 30 minutes long so far. We're still learning how to make them, of course, but we have the full character arcs for literally years. So we're laying the framework for the first three captains in Early Access, and then every four months or so we're going to release a new season with a new captain, new units and new audio dramas. So, yeah, we've got years and years of this planned."

### THE ART OF WAR

I've not got much patience for audio logs these days, but science-fiction radio plays? Yeah, I can fully get myself behind that. And unlike, say, an FPS, where the last thing I want to do is stand still and listen to someone narrate their final days, I'd be very interested in listening to some audio dramas about the captains while I paint them.

This is very much a tabletop tradition – making the story adjacent to the game or between matches rather than something that plays out during it. At least that's what it's like

## CULTURE CLUB

Get to know the first trio of cultures



### METHEDORI

Roman-inspired space cops, the Methedori are rule-loving protectors and evocative of Warhammer 40K's Imperium.



### SMUGGLERS

An eclectic group of space-faring rogues, the Smugglers are a bunch of free-wheeling weirdos and clearly not a fan of the Methedori's rules.



### CHOLEK

Mystical and esoteric, the Cholek are a Central American-inspired group with a penchant for walking on stilts and throwing bombs.





## COVER FEATURE

### Moonbreaker

when it comes to strategy games. When I'm painting, I usually have a podcast or TV show on anyway. And I suspect I'm going to be spending a lot of time painting in *Moonbreaker*.

Every character has a default paint job, and they look great, but can you really call it your crew if you haven't painted each of them yourself? Absolutely. Screw gatekeeping. But you should paint them anyway. Unknown Worlds considered giving players unpainted models as the default, like Warhammer "to encourage you to paint", but the team ultimately decided that "it just felt too crappy to have a blank unit".

All the tools I normally have to dig out of the sarcophagus where I keep all my Warhammer stuff have been recreated digitally, and in ways that make them much easier to use. The absolute bane of my existence is edge-highlighting, which requires good eyes and steady hands. My eyes are knackered and my hands are about as stable as a geriatric alcoholic. In *Moonbreaker*, you can do it in a few strokes. What's so great about the end result is that it doesn't look perfect. In places, the highlights might not be completely even, or some parts might be a little more faded than others. Some of this is down to the tools trying to emulate human imperfections, but it's also affected by how vigorous or slapdash you are when you're using them. These touches are what make these characters look like physical miniatures instead of regular 3D videogame models.

There's a basic paint tool, a wash, a dry brush, an airbrush, stippling and decals, and you can even mix colours to create your own. You'll get a lot of different colours to work with without doing that, though, including paints that glow or look like different materials. There's a handy masking tool, as well, so if you're trying to paint your gun to give it a metallic look and don't want to also paint the hand at the same time, you can make it so that the paint only hits the gun. Everything feels like it's been designed to give you all the tools you'd expect with none of the frustration that comes from not being the world's best miniature painter.

"I just want this to be relaxing," says Cleveland. "I learned how to draw over the pandemic. It was using Procreate on my iPad and Apple pencil and I just fell in love with painting and how relaxed I felt. So that's one of the inspirations for this painting setup."

Additional paints, decals, special paint jobs and captain skins will come with new seasons, unlocked via the free seasonal track. Other cosmetic upgrades will also be available, eventually letting you prettify each unit. And then you can give units funky auras by spending another resource, Dust, which might cover them in shadows or fire.

Progressing through the season or adding auras doesn't reflect your skill at the game, but there's also a mastery system that gives units ranks and titles for playing and winning with them. So there are a lot

ABOVE: The Ultramarines would absolutely love this place.

© 2024 Unknown Worlds Entertainment

of ways for you to show off when you face your opponents, who will typically be other players, though there is a singleplayer mode known as Cargo Run. "This is heavily inspired by Dungeon Run for *Hearthstone*," explains Cleveland. "We've tried a whole bunch of different singleplayer modes, and this is the one that just works the best."

### BOSS RUSH

This singleplayer challenge mode pits you against five bosses in a row. These bosses are like "mini captains", Cleveland says, and are unique to the mode. Depending on your captain, you will always start with the same roster, versus a random boss. And each subsequent boss gets more health than the last, ramping up the challenge. To help you out, there are upgrades littering the map, which you can grab to beef up your units. "So you're basically modifying your roster as you play," he adds.

*Moonbreaker* could hardly be more different from *Subnautica*, but you can still see the familiar







ADDITIONAL PAINTS, DECALS,  
SPECIAL PAINT JOBS AND  
CAPTAIN SKINS WILL COME  
WITH NEW SEASONS

Unknown Worlds design philosophy in the way it's trying to create an accessible game that's still a great source of challenge. Hopefully it will do for turn-based tactics what *Subnautica* did for survival games. But I'm just ecstatic that the painting is so good. The last videogame with an excellent model painting system,

*Might & Magic Showdown*, didn't fare so well, but *Moonbreaker* has one advantage: it's not horrible to play.

While it has quite a bit in common with free-to-play live service games, *Moonbreaker* is a buy-to-play deal. And you'll be able to check it out soon: it hits Early Access on September 29. ■

## THE REAL DEAL

How to get into model painting IRL



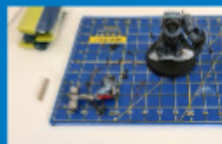
### START SMALL

Don't just splash out on a whole Warhammer army. Instead get a cool unit or squad that speaks to you and start experimenting with painting techniques and see how you get on.



### INVEST IN GOOD BRUSHES

You'll save more money in the long run by picking up some high-quality brushes. I recommend a small brush for fine details, a larger one for the main areas, and then a dry brush.



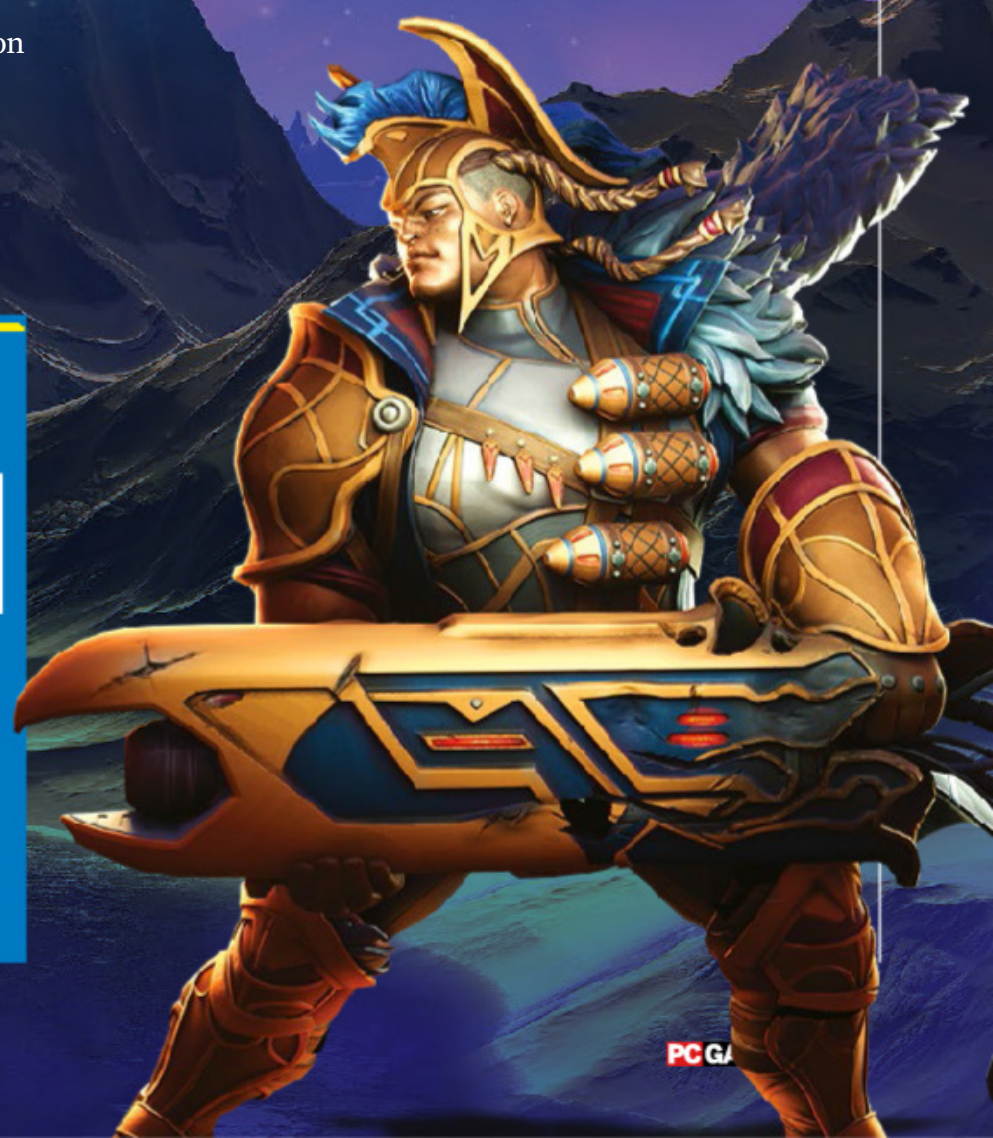
### BE FLEXIBLE

You're going to make mistakes and you'll wish you'd given them different limbs or weapons. Get some 'green stuff' to fill in mould lines or breaks, and use tiny magnets so you can swap parts easily.



### BEYOND WARHAMMER

There's so much more than just Warhammer, and you might be better off getting a game with some cheaper, disposable models when you're just starting out.





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FEATURE

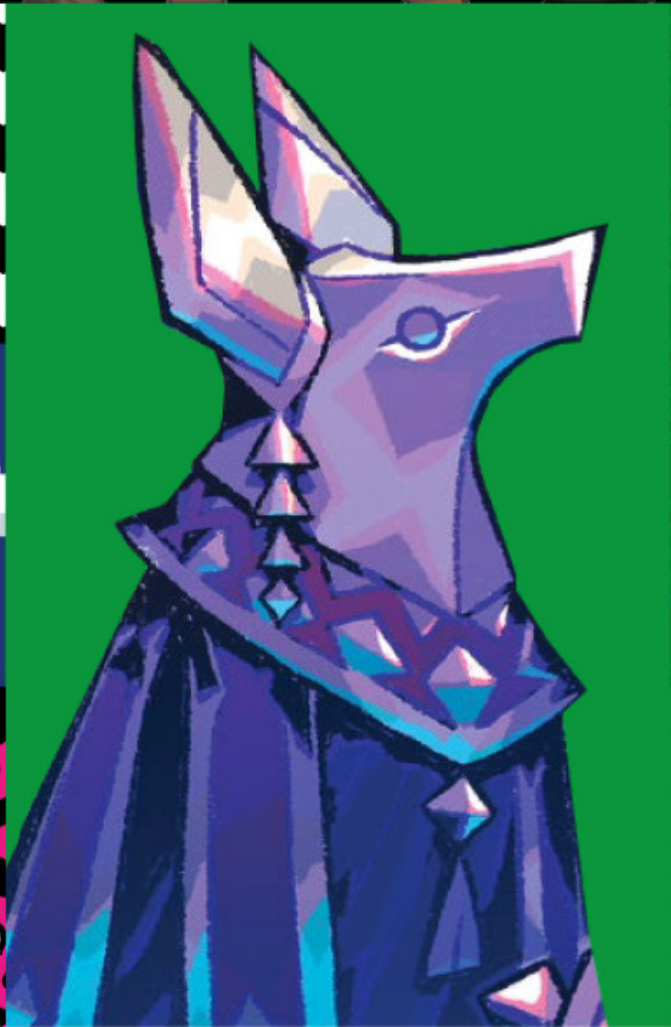
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PC GAMING  
IN *Brazil*:  
EXORBITANT  
HARDWARE,  
IRREPRESSIBLE  
COMPETITIVE  
SPIRIT, AND THE  
MOST INFAMOUS  
LAUGH ON THE  
INTERNET

Words by  
Wes Fenlon

Illustration by  
John Strike





**I**f Brazil is famous for one thing, it's the laugh. Or maybe the Amazon – that whole rainforest is kind of a big deal. Or Pelé, legendary football player. Or right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro? Or the Caipirinha, the national drink? Look, Brazil is the fifth biggest country in the world: it has a lot to be famous for. Brazilian gamers will point to its history of Sega Master System clones and bootleg game cartridges, creative workarounds for outrageous import prices. But if you ask PC gamers, it's gotta be *huehuehue*.

The Brazilian Portuguese version of *hahaha* became a meme in early MMOs, and later in *League of Legends*, as the games attracted huge numbers of Brazilian players. *Huehuehue* became a trolly way for others to mock Brazilian players, though the indie developers I met in São Paulo during the Brazil International Games festival felt like they were firmly in on the joke. "Those of us from Brazil, we love this," says indie developer Leonardo Castanho. "We do this joke with ourselves, sometimes. Latin American players use *jajajaja*, and we make fun of that, too."

Brazil's famous laugh may have more than a little to do with the

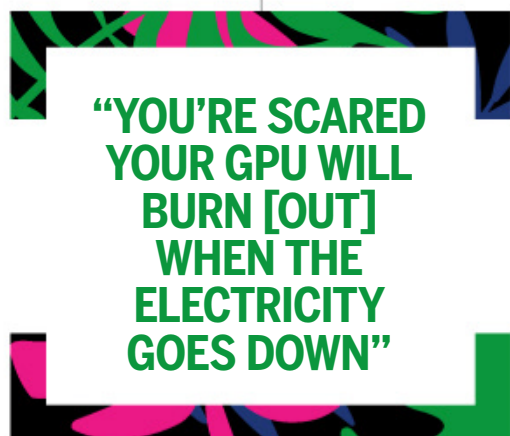
country's competitive nature in sports and esports. Camilla Slotfeldt, founder of BitCake Studio, had mischief in her eyes when she broke down the difference between *huehuehue* and real Brazilian laughter. "It's very common for people to laugh like *huahuhua*," she says. "*Huehuehue* is more of a troll kind of laugh, and it became a meme that represented the trolling side of Brazilians, where you do things in a way that you shouldn't really do, but kind of get away with it. That's *huehuehue*."

Before going to Brazil I thought the laugh was mostly used against Portuguese-speaking players. But after speaking to Slotfeldt, who's only ever seen *huehuehue* typed by other Brazilians, I realised that many of the

country's PC gamers solely experience it as an in-joke. Brazil's gaming scene is its own pocket galaxy – partially because it doesn't get enough attention from the rest of the world, and partially because Brazil really is that big all by itself. What's a little light trolling between you and 95 million fellow gamers?

### ARM AND A LEG

According to stats published by Newzoo at the 2021 Brazil International Games festival, close to half of Brazil's 215 million people play games, with 24% of them on PC. The







PC market may be the smallest, but the developers I talked to says that's largely about access, not taste. Being a PC gamer in Brazil means you're either wealthy enough to afford obscenely expensive hardware, or you're most likely playing free-to-play games like *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* on a low-spec machine.

In much more dramatic terms, being a PC gamer in Brazil means, "You're constantly scared your GPU will burn [out] when the electricity goes down," says Thiago Cancian, lead designer of the indie team making pinchy crustacean battler *Knights of the Deep*.

Buying pricey tech from abroad is unrealistic for the average Brazilian, thanks to taxes and a weak exchange rate, particularly against the US dollar. For years any import goods bought online were taxed 60%, so a \$1,000 PC would actually cost \$1,600 – or 8,000 Brazilian real. The average monthly wage, according to Brazil's government, is about R\$2,600, or \$520 USD. A modest PC would cost more than three months' pay even if you didn't have pesky expenses like food and rent.

Despite the popularity of free-to-play games, getting into PC gaming still ultimately comes back to hardware. For the 12 million Brazilians who live in favelas, owning a PC is impossibly out of reach. According to a 2021 survey, 43% of Brazilians in favelas have either poor mobile internet at home or none at all. Cyber cafes provide key access to the internet, and to games.

## THE COUNTER-STRIKE LEGACY

Three moments from Brazil's love affair with Counter-Strike



**TRIPLE CHAMPS**  
In 2016, SK Gaming's Brazilian team became #1 in the world, winning Dreamhack Austin, ESL Pro League S3 and ESL Cologne.



**GAULES CONQUERS TWITCH**  
At CS:GO Antwerp 2022, Alexandre 'Gaules' Borba set the #9 Twitch viewership record.



**RIO SELLS OUT**  
ESL is holding its first-ever Brazilian major in November. 15,000 tickets sold out within an hour.

## A WAY IN

Esports is starting to look like a viable career for a lucky few thanks to organisations like AfroGames, which offers favelas access to PC games and English and programming classes. But little of the money ends up in the players' pockets. In 2021, nonprofit publication Rest of World highlighted how esports sponsors have seen product sales spike in Brazil while players still can't afford their own PCs. Winners of a major tournament, "Made no more than a combined \$6,000 – a modest amount, considering the tournament's final was broadcast by SporTV, one of the biggest sports channels in Brazil," Rest of World reports.

The situation is getting slightly better: the government has reduced import tax rates 20% in the last year to combat inflation. But high-end

1 BitCake honed its 3D action chops with *Holodrive*, which is F2P on Steam.

2 *Relic Hunters Legend* has some big ideas about making online multiplayer more communal.

3 Yes, *Knights of the Deep* has lobsters with rocket launchers.

4 I don't know much, but I know anything with a keytar in it is cool, so *Keylocker* is alright in my book.







**1** The BIG festival got some major players this year: Nintendo, Xbox, and PlayStation all had booths.

**2** Astrea takes a lot from *Slay the Spire*, but its art is a cut above.

**3** Casually searching for your soul in *Eternal Hope*.

**4** *Relic Hunters Legend* allows you to choose from several Hunters with unique abilities.

➤ hardware is still largely out of reach. Until recently, Cancian's three-man indie team was working on ten-year-old PCs. "Things are improving slowly," Cancian says. "I'm looking forward to the next decade – hardware will be more accessible, and more people will be able to start developing games here. I think the hardware being as expensive as it is really is a tough barrier to entry."

Camilla Slotfeldt, who spent her teenage years playing Korean MMO *Ragnarok Online*, the game that made *huehuehue* famous, says that PC gaming today seems to skew a bit older due to mobile. "For a long time PC gaming was huge, but now a lot of young people don't have PCs and just have phones. MMOs got huge here in Brazil, and then MOBAs... [now] some households just don't have PCs,

which is very weird for me, but each person has a phone and they do basically everything on the phone."

But Brazil's indie developers are targeting the PC. They see it as a greater opportunity than the overcrowded mobile market, and despite how many players there are in Brazil, the real dream is to break through to an international audience.

### MADE IN BRAZIL

Selling games internationally is one area where the exchange rate works out favourably for developers based in Brazil, and it's realistically the only way for indie studios to grow; there's simply no way for them to make games like *Valorant* and *CS:GO*, which are particularly popular in Brazil. 2D indies dominated the BIG festival when I visited this year.

For Brazil's PC gamers, what's popular is a lot like what's popular anywhere else. The top-selling games of June 2020 on Nuuvem, a Brazilian online store, are all familiar names: *Civilization VI*, *Monster Train*, *Darkest Dungeon*, *Dark Souls*. But language can be a roadblock: according to SteamSpy only about 8,000 of Steam's 63,000 games are available in Portuguese, and only about 5% of Brazilians speak English.

"I learned with *Pokémon*," says Slotfeldt. "The games were only in English – still to this day, actually, *Pokémon* doesn't have Portuguese. A lot of people aren't happy about that."

It's an understandable frustration – Nintendo launched the Switch in Brazil in 2020, so it's clearly

## BRAZIL'S INDIE FACES

The indie devs we spoke to at the games fest



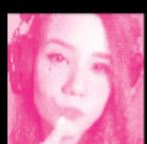
**LEONARDO CASTANHO**  
Namesake of Little Leo Games, making *Slay the Spire*-like 'dicebuilder' *Astrea* as his first indie project.



**CAMILLA SLOTFELDT**  
Founder & CEO of BitCake Studio, which started with VR games before making 2021's *Holodrive*.

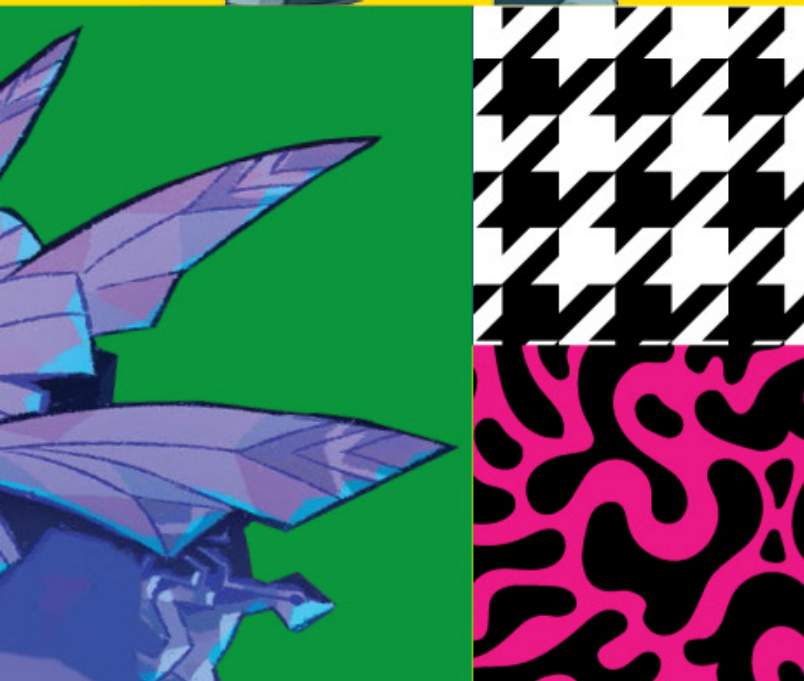


**THIAGO CANSIAN**  
Founder of Studio Prima Materia, and director of lobster fighter *Knights of the Deep*.



**RENATA KATHERINI**  
Renata's not a developer, but she is an engineer and a *CS:GO* streamer and esports caster on Twitch.





interested in the population of 215 million Portuguese-speaking players. But it's only localised one game so far. This is one reason competitive games have found an audience in Brazil: *CS:GO*, *Valorant*, *Fortnite*, *League of Legends*, *Rainbow Six Siege*, and *Apex Legends* all support Portuguese.

### FIGHTING SPIRIT

At BIG I talked to young *CS:GO* streamer Renata Katherini, who jumps on Twitch after her day job as an engineer. Despite already having a career she's interested in working full-time in esports. Those opportunities are rare in Brazil – but again, it's easy for outsiders to underestimate how big Brazil's audience is. The country contains more than 90% of the world's Portuguese speakers, and streamer Alexandre 'Gaules' Borba pulled in more than 700,000 of them simultaneously during a *CS:GO* major earlier this year. That put him in the top ten of all-time most-viewed Twitch streams, and he didn't even need Drake to do it.

"Access to games is much easier now, so I hope younger people will be more active professionally playing games," Katherini explains. "Language is kind of a barrier for [Brazilians watching big streamers from the US and Europe], but when the action is going on, everybody speaks the same language."

Lumping every Brazilian into the esports bucket would be silly – no country made up of millions of people has such narrow tastes. But I think Brazil's gaming population is unique in that it's at once a monolith and a global minority – big enough to fill regional servers and spawn memes about their laughter, but still forced to learn English or hope a game gets a Portuguese translation. Without the money required to fund dozens of competing local esports teams, Brazilians rally around faves like MIBR like they're Olympians on the world stage. I can see how eternally being at the mercy of game studios a hemisphere away could intertwine with that national pride to

create a uniquely passionate competitive audience.

Being a PC gamer in Brazil means having a streak of that fighting spirit, whether it's playing games or making them. "Brazilians really like competitive

games. And the Brazilian audience has a tendency for free games – that's just the truth. Especially with mobile, they expect games should be free. It's a different kind of gamer, really," says Slotfeldt.

"Maybe people from Brazil suffer a little more making a game," says Leonardo Castanho. "We're used to a struggle. I don't want to say we work harder than you guys in the US, but maybe when it's harder, you run after it more." ■

"ACCESS TO GAMES IS MUCH EASIER NOW, SO I HOPE YOUNGER PEOPLE WILL BE MORE ACTIVE"





# REVIEW

## HOW WE REVIEW

We review each game on its own merits, and try to match it to a reviewer who's a passionate expert in the field. The main aim of reviews is to help you make buying decisions. To this end, we're selective about what we review, and try to focus on the notable, interesting, exciting or surprising.

### DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT

DLC might be new missions for a game, or it might be a single new item. If we think you want to know about it, we'll review it.

### EARLY ACCESS

Any released alpha, beta, or otherwise unfinished game that you can currently pay for. For these games, we won't assign a score, but we will tell you whether they're worth your time.

### THEY'RE BACK

Whenever there's a bargain or re-release of a significant game, our expert will revisit it and tell you whether it holds up today. With jokes.

## OUR SCORING SYSTEM EXPLAINED

**00%-09%** Broken or offensively bad; absolutely no value.

**Example** *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*

**10%-19%** We might be able to find one nice thing to say about it, but still not worth anyone's time or money.

**Example** *Gettysburg: Armored Warfare*

**20%-29%** Completely falls short of its goals. Very few redeeming qualities.

**Examples** *Family Guy: Back to the Multiverse*

**30%-39%** An entirely clumsy or derivative effort. There's little reason to play this game over a similar, better one.

**Examples** *Trials of the Blood Dragon*

**40%-49%** Flawed and disappointing.

**Examples** *Aliens: Colonial Marines*

**50%-59%** Mediocre. Other games probably do it better, or its unique qualities aren't executed well.

**Examples** *Primordia, Homefront: The Revolution*

**60%-69%** There's something to like here, but it can only be recommended with major caveats.

**Examples** *No Man's Sky, Ghost Recon: Wildlands*

**70%-79%** A good game that's worth playing. We like it.

**Examples** *Prey, NieR: Automata*

**80%-89%** A great game with exceptional moments or features, and touches of brilliance. We love it.

**Examples** *Overwatch, Night in the Woods*

**90%-94%** A compelling recommendation for most PC gamers. Important to PC gaming, and likely ahead of its time.

**Examples** *Bayonetta, Dishonored 2*

**95%-96%** Far and away one of the best games we've ever played. We recommend it to the entire world.

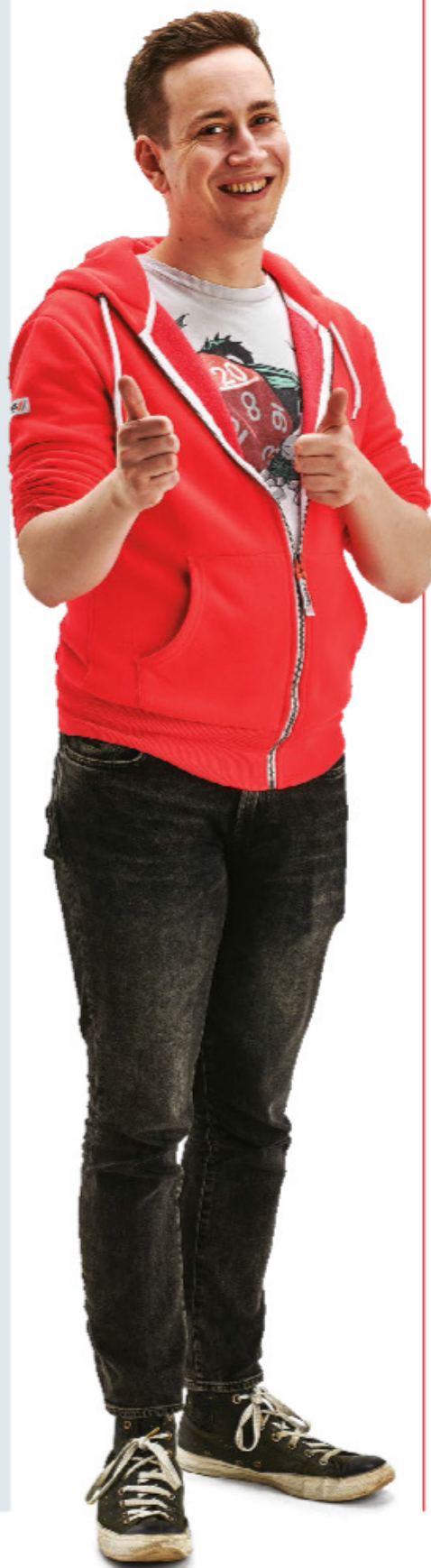
**Examples** *Half-Life 2, Kerbal Space Program*

**97%-100%** Advances the human species. Boosts the immune systems of nearby children and small animals.



The Editor's Choice award is granted in addition to the score, at the discretion of the PC Gamer staff. It represents exceptional quality or innovation.

Find out more  
[www.bit.ly/pcgreviews](http://www.bit.ly/pcgreviews)



## IP freely

We live in the Age of IP. Once upon a time, *MultiVersus* would've seemed bizarre – a fighting game featuring such a broad array of Warner-owned characters that you can make Arya Stark fight the Iron Giant. But in a post-*Fortnite* world, it's nothing out of the ordinary. Stuffing your game with iconic creations is a hedged bet; the average person is bound to be a fan of at least one of them. It's undoubtedly cynical and creatively stagnant... and yet weirdly compelling. I love *MultiVersus* for its solid mechanics – but I have to admit I also find a surreal humour in these mash-ups. There's almost something subversive about the chaos of them, the way that all context is obliterated and a pacifist robot will happily battle an assassin who bakes her enemies into pies. Hey, if you can't fight the cultural dystopia, you might as well enjoy it.

**ROBIN VALENTINE**  
**PRINT EDITOR**

[robin.valentine@futurenet.com](mailto:robin.valentine@futurenet.com)

### LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK

Email us via [letters@pcgamer.com](mailto:letters@pcgamer.com) with your reactions, or simply tweet us your thoughts @PCGamer





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## This month's criminal gang of reviewers...



**JODY MCGREGOR**  
**Specialist in**  
Saintly devotion  
**Currently playing**  
*Saints Row*  
**This month**  
Discovered that even  
throwing yourself into  
traffic isn't fun  
anymore.



**MOLLIE TAYLOR**  
**Specialist in**  
Iron Giant's hitbox  
**Currently playing**  
*MultiVersus*  
**This month**  
Learned to fear the  
power of a teenager  
swinging a backpack  
around in circles.



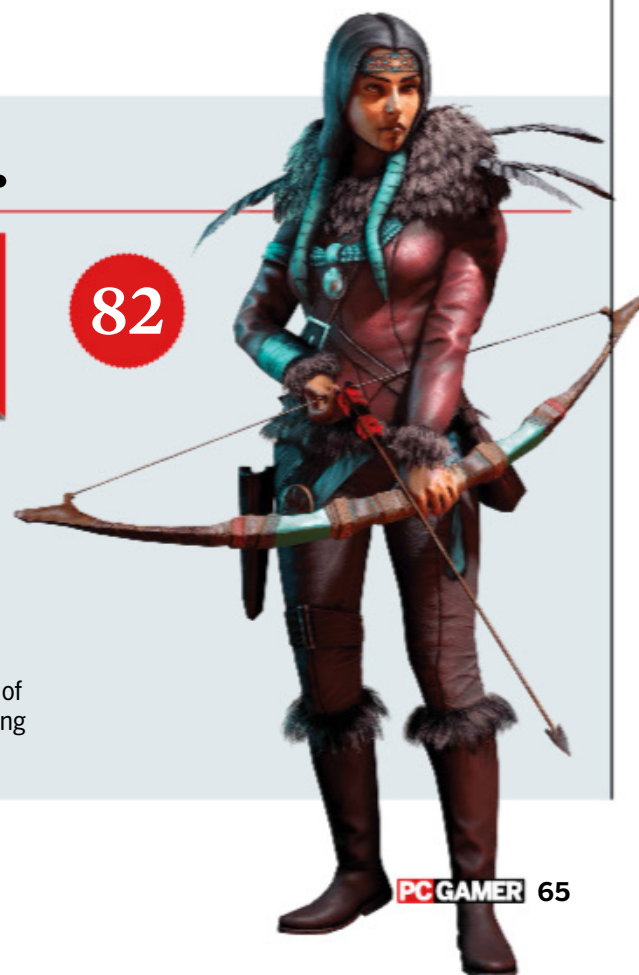
**SAMANTHA  
GREER**  
**Specialist in**  
Lost souls  
**Currently playing**  
*Thymesia*  
**This month**  
Had to write yet  
another review of a  
bad *Souls*-like. Sorry.



**KAILE HULTNER**  
**Specialist in**  
Movie magic  
**Currently playing**  
*Immortality*  
**This month**  
Watched three films to  
review one videogame.  
What are developers  
playing at?



**IAN EVENDEN**  
**Specialist in**  
Cowboy magic  
**Currently playing**  
*Hard West 2*  
**This month**  
Discovered the  
supernatural power of  
poker (beyond making  
money disappear).





# SAINT NO JOKE

The rebooted **SAINTS ROW** could really do with a dubstep gun

By Jody Macgregor

**S**aints Row is a knockabout driving/shooting/flying ragdoll-'em-up in which you lead a misnamed gang of sociopaths. The Saints are loveable sociopaths to be fair, who alternate between organised crime and high-spirited hijinx like throwing themselves into traffic for insurance money, and also some light drug trafficking on the side. That's probably the only description I can come up with vague enough to describe every game in the series, including this new reboot, without just saying it's *GTA* except the jokes are funny.

Until now, every *Saints Row* sequel was more over the top than the one before, eventually finding new tops and then somehow over-ing them.

*Saints Row 2* had a villain with voodoo powers and your sidekick could take on an entire police force solo. *Saints Row: The Third* made you fight wrestlers, cyberpunks and zombies, which *Saints Row 4* bettered with an alien invasion, while its spin-off *Gat Out of Hell* had Satan as the final boss.

When fans of *SR2* say they miss how grounded it was, they mean they were OK with a game that had motorbike katana duels, but *SR3* including a Japanese game show about straight-up murdering people crossed the line. Personally, I enjoyed the escalating wackiness of the series, but it didn't leave itself a lot of places to go. Which I guess is why, instead of making a new *Saints Row* where you time-travel or establish a branch

on an alien planet or something, Volition hit the reboot button.

## SAINT THAT A SHAME

### Online I've seen these Saints called zoomers and millennials

A *Saints Row* about starting from the ground floor might please people who miss the 'grit' of *Saints Row 2*, but if the internet is anything to go by they hate it already. The reboot comes with a new cast they despised

from the first trailer. Online I've seen these Saints called zoomers and millennials as well as hipsters, which is an impressive range of meaningless descriptors that all amount to "young people I don't understand".

One of the new Saints quit an unpaid internship to become a mechanic for a crime boss, one's a startup entrepreneur who overdosed on motivational TED talks and podcasts, and the other's a DJ who is allergic to wearing a shirt. Meanwhile, you work for a private security firm whose disposable

## NEED TO KNOW

### WHAT IS IT?

An urban playground where the cars are made of explodium, but the tone's not quite as incendiary

### EXPECT TO PAY

£60

### DEVELOPER

Volition

### PUBLISHER

Deep Silver

### REVIEWED ON

Windows 10, Ryzen 9 5900X, 32GB RAM, RTX 3080

### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### LINK

[saintsrow.com](https://saintsrow.com)

employees often don't survive training. All these characters parody modern archetypes just like the old games' wannabe energy drink mogul, post-hippie stoner, and Auto-Tuned pimp did back when they were relevant. While I don't care about the new crew in the same way as the scoundrels who grew into a close-knit family over the course of the original games, these characters haven't had a bunch of sequels to develop. They're fine.

We meet these rebooted Saints at their peak in an intro where they run the city, then spend the next 25 hours in a flashback covering how they got there. That means after fully customising your boss to look like, say, an elderly Batman villain or a mime who has turned to crime, suddenly you're an ordinary schmo with a day job in law enforcement and roommates who are so young they know and care who Doja Cat is. I ended up swapping my carefully designed character for the first preset an hour in because I felt like a miscast actor. Which is a shame, because it's a great character creator in a series known for them.

Even if you stick with a default face, the clothing options let you get fancy with layers, mixing and matching shirts under jackets and socks separately from shoes. That's something *Saints Row* hasn't done since embracing clothes with physics. The cost is that coats and skirts are noticeably stiff and most of the hairstyles are static, for reasons that became obvious when I tried a ponytail and it clipped right through my face. Still, whether you want your boss to be a leather-jacket badass, bright green doofus, or dressed as a taco, *Saints Row* provides.

## SAINT GOT THAT SWING

When I'm wearing a luchador mask and murdering EDM-themed criminals who twirl glowstick shields, *Saints Row* is a good time. You can shoot while lying prone on

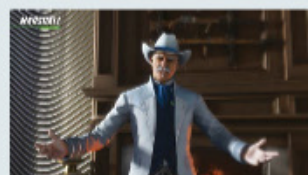
## YOUR RIVALS

These jerks are even worse than you



### SERGIO

Boss of Los Panteros, a gang who smuggle contraband across the border in their sweet, souped-up rides.



### ATTICUS

Runs Marshall Defense Industries, a private peacekeeping agency of high-tech cowboys.



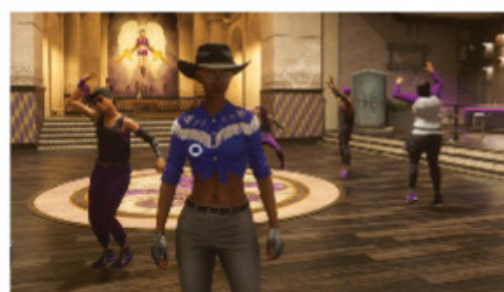
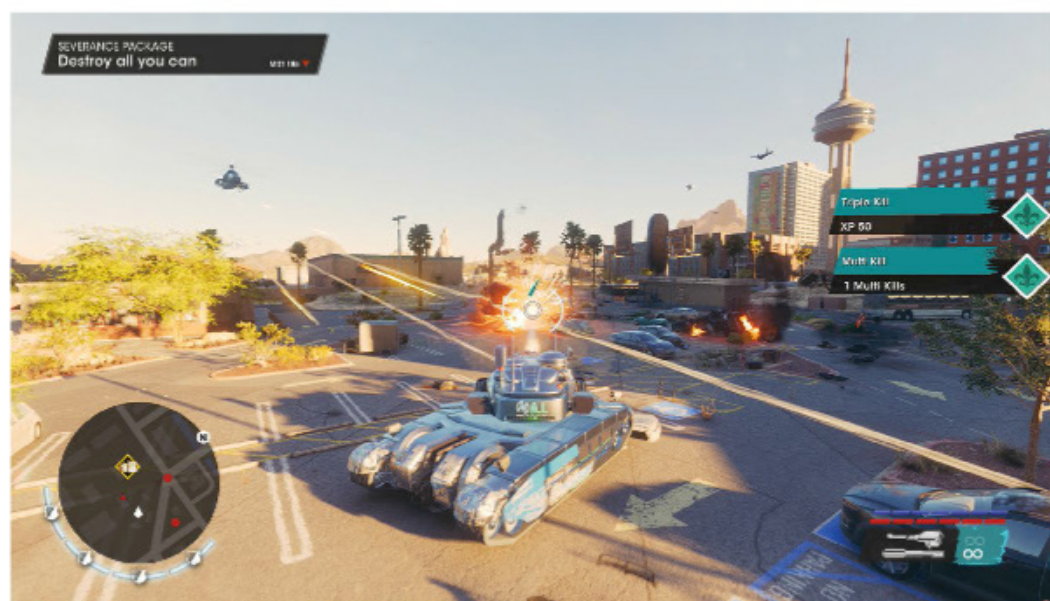
### THE COLLECTIVE

Six anonymous pseudo-anarchists who play Robin Hood while actually running a cult called The Idols.





What have Daft Punk been doing since they disbanded? Crimes.



**FAR LEFT:** The tank rampage is also a gag about AI vehicles.

**LEFT:** The crib gets more luxe as you play.

**BELOW:** Who would have thought the young man would have so much blood in him?





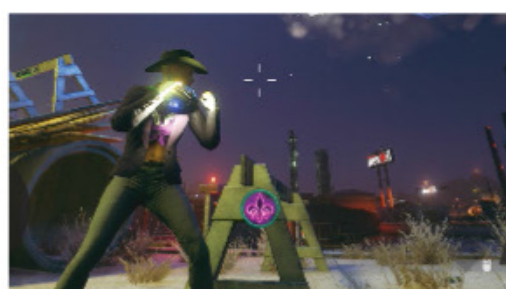
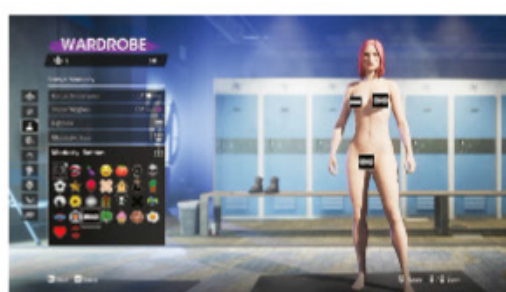


Kev is allergic to cats as well as wearing a shirt.



**RIGHT:** A variety of censor bars for the connoisseur.

**FAR RIGHT:** Boats blow up nice.



Monster trucks, a Saints Row staple.



top of moving cars, and unlock abilities that let you do gun-fu or jam a grenade down someone's pants then chuck them at a crowd. The takedown animations include lots of gory knife-and-pistol work, but also human torpedoes and a Karate Kid crane kick.

Options to change how it plays are welcome and plentiful, with a menu that should be shown to other games while they sit in the corner and think about what they've done. The GPS arrows that illuminate streets to show you where to go can be turned off or tweaked so they only highlight corners, the minimap can be resized, enemy health changed if you find them too spongy or too weak, ammo scarcity altered, nudity toggled or covered with a variety of humorous censor bars, time limits extended or turned off completely – there's lots of stuff to fiddle with.

I was tempted to set mission timers to be more forgiving after a bug made the countdown vanish and I failed one because I didn't realise the clock had started. In the end I didn't actually mess with these settings, apart from the vehicle camera's snappiness. I just appreciate they exist, which is how I feel about the drop-in two-player mode I will also never bother with because... just leave me alone.

It runs well on PC too, which wasn't a given. To get a decent framerate out of *Saints Row: The Third Remastered* I had to turn off Windows 10's data execution

prevention, and the original version of *SR3* is just as quirky about running on modern hardware. Meanwhile, the reboot stays well over 60fps and looks nicer doing it than early trailers suggested. Some of the corners cut to make that framerate happen are obvious, like the fuzzy hair that makes your cat look like it

stepped out of another game, the occasional odd shadow or jagged item of clothing, and the way cars in the middle distance transition to the ethereal plane when they see you coming.

The city's not particularly bustling either. Santo Ileso, a desert burg somewhere in the American Southwest, doesn't have the kind of crowded centre that's fun to buzz in a stolen helicopter as you weave between the skyscraper forest. It's so flat I forgot I even had a wingsuit when I wasn't doing the side hustles that force you to use it.

## SAINT NO DOUBT

A hallmark of the *Saints Row* games is how they connect those open world activities. You never feel like a different character to the one in the main plot when you pull some sidequest mayhem, because you're just as much of a maniac in the cutscenes. And you have to do side stuff to unlock new missions, a push and pull that usually means at least one long stretch of chores because you ate too much meat before polishing off your vegetables.

That's more aggravating than usual here because the jobs you need



to do, called criminal ventures, are the worst they've ever been. Having to drive trucks full of toxic waste to a dump without spilling it gets real tedious, and the returning insurance fraud activity (the one where you run into traffic) is less fun than it used to be. The ragdoll after-touch has been toned down, making it harder to tumble into multiple cars for combos as you flop down the highway like a fish with a death wish.

The best new venture is testing experimental prototypes you get to keep, including a hoverboard and sticky rocket-bombs called thrustbusters that propel targets into the sky like they've been alien-abducted. Apart from that I found myself sticking to vanilla side missions, like stealing food trucks, because the others were so underwhelming.

Unlocking these criminal ventures costs increasing amounts of cash too, and spending \$400,000 or more on one that turns out to be a dud is a real kick in the teeth. (Honestly, delay the toxic dump one as long as you can.)

Compared to spraying sewage on mansions to lower property values or driving a car while being mauled by a tiger who sits in the passenger seat, the reboot's activities seem down-to-earth. One of them is literally just taking photos. Likewise, apart from the thrustbusters and a foam glove pistol, most of the weapons are real guns, and while there are perks to throw antigravity grenades or summon backup Saints out of thin air, you're only allowed to put four on your ability wheel at a time. (Half the time the backup Saints stand around doing nothing while getting shot.)

*Saints Row* is always at its best when it cuts loose, when it goes full dubstep-gun stupid, and the reboot forgets that for long stretches. When it remembers, you get things like a storyline in which you take part in a citywide LARP, fighting Mad Max roleplayers with foam weapons while dressed in cardboard armour, and that's the kind of daftness it could do with more of. ■

PC GAMER

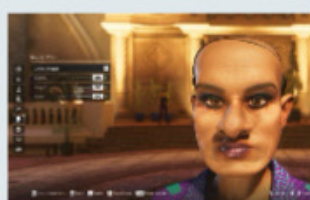
VERDICT

Unfortunately the knockabout glee of *Saints Row* ultraviolence is held back by new-found restraint.

60

## EASY SLIDER

### The four stages of character creation



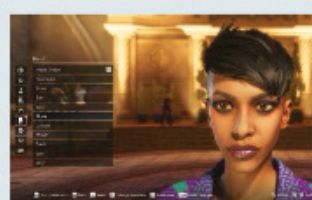
**STAGE 1**  
What if I just push every slider all the way to the right?



**STAGE 2**  
Barber, give me the worst haircut available, please.



**STAGE 3**  
I definitely won't get sick of having stuff all over my face.



**STAGE 4**  
[Hours later] You know what, let's just stick with a preset.



# CLOSE COMBAT

**MULTIVERSUS** is an unexpectedly great matchup – even if it does whiff a few attacks

By Mollie Taylor

I'm Adventure Time's Jake the Dog, standing on the edge of a Rick and Morty-themed arena. I'm about to beat Shaggy from Scooby-Doo into a bloody pulp while my teammate Arya Stark is casually stealing Batman's face. A few years ago this would have given me severe whiplash, but in a world where tennis star Naomi Osaka is throwing hands at Naruto in *Fortnite*, nothing surprises me any more. Well, except for one thing: *MultiVersus* is actually pretty damn good.

Believe me, I never expected it either. The initial reveal left me disinterested – it looked like another weaksauce attempt to be *Smash Bros*, and I'm not much of a platform fighter gal anyway. I much prefer my fighting games in a tight, enclosed 3D arena a la *Tekken* and *Soulcalibur*. I came into *MultiVersus* not expecting much, but found that Player First Games has begun to lay the groundwork for something remarkable.

Don't get me wrong, *MultiVersus*'s biggest inspiration is still clear. Anyone who has spent a modicum of time with Nintendo's brawler will quickly get the gist: smack your opponent with a mixture of normal, air, and special attacks in order to increase their damage meter; avoid letting them do the same to you. Victory has nothing to do with

getting a health bar from 100 to 0, it's all done through the damage meter. While the number is low, you're weighty and difficult to knock off the top and sides of the arena. As it gets higher though, your character turns into a rubber bouncy ball, and becomes susceptible to all kinds of spikes and knockback attacks that can fling you straight into the death zone. Knock your opponent out of the arena

enough times and you'll claim victory.

## Every character has abilities that can support teammates

### MULTI PLAYER

It's your standard platform fighter formula at this point, but *MultiVersus* manages a few key differences that really set it apart. The first one is how the game handles its roster. Every character belongs to a class: tank, support, mage, bruiser, and assassin. Tanks like Wonder Woman and Iron

### NEED TO KNOW

**WHAT IS IT?**  
A platform fighter with an eclectic, iconic cast of characters.

**EXPECT TO PAY**  
Free-to-play

**DEVELOPER**  
Player First Games

**PUBLISHER**  
Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment

**REVIEWED ON**  
Nvidia GeForce RTX3070, AMD Ryzen 7 2700X, 16GB RAM

**MULTIPLAYER**  
Yes

**LINK**  
[multiversus.com](https://multiversus.com)

Giant can take more hits and are harder to ring out but are slower. Assassins like Finn the Human and Arya Stark are nimble fighters, dealing big damage quickly.

What's nice is there doesn't feel like any pressure to match up particular classes – you can easily run a team of two supports and successfully outmatch bruisers and tanks if you have the skill. They're a great initial indicator of how you can expect to play each character, but it doesn't feel like any one class is at an inherent disadvantage compared to the others.

There are also the game modes themselves. While other platformers feel more at home in a free-for-all or 1v1 setting, *MultiVersus* thrives off a 2v2 format. The other two modes are present in the game, but this game was absolutely made for 2v2 and it's where I spent most of my time. Every character has abilities that can support teammates as well as harm foes. Jake the Dog can swallow opponents and spit them out, but he can also quickly chomp an ally and save them from a nasty combo. Wonder Woman's lasso can grab onto opponents but also serve as a quick rescue for teammates.

### KILLER INSTINCT

It took me a while to get used to the synergy of playing with another person, and to the way *MultiVersus* feels in general. It's an awful lot floatier than other fighting games I've played – it's lacking a bit of weight, and characters can hover around for what feels like a lifetime. It starts to feel pretty good once you're in the flow of things though. While I would still like a little more snap, the floatiness feels largely necessary for decent recovery and actually making use of those teammate abilities.

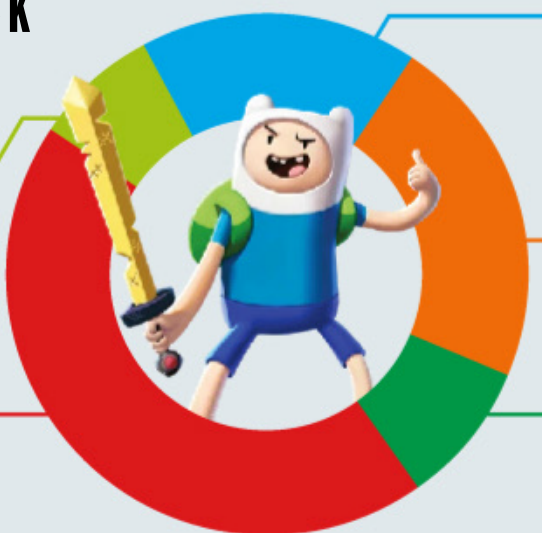
I had access to the entire roster straight away, but those coming into it free-to-play will have to work to unlock each one. Thankfully each one is readily available to try out in

## SMACKPACK

What's in Finn's bag?

**8% HAIRBRUSH**  
He's gotta get those luscious blonde locks under that hat somehow...

**44% NEPTR**  
Who let the never-ending pie-throwing robot bastard loose?



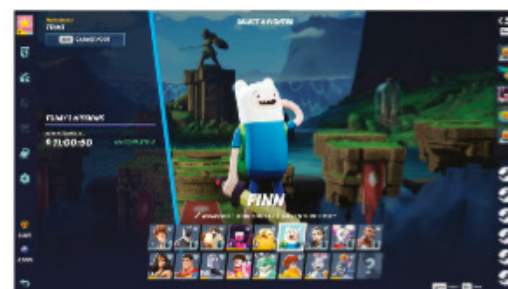
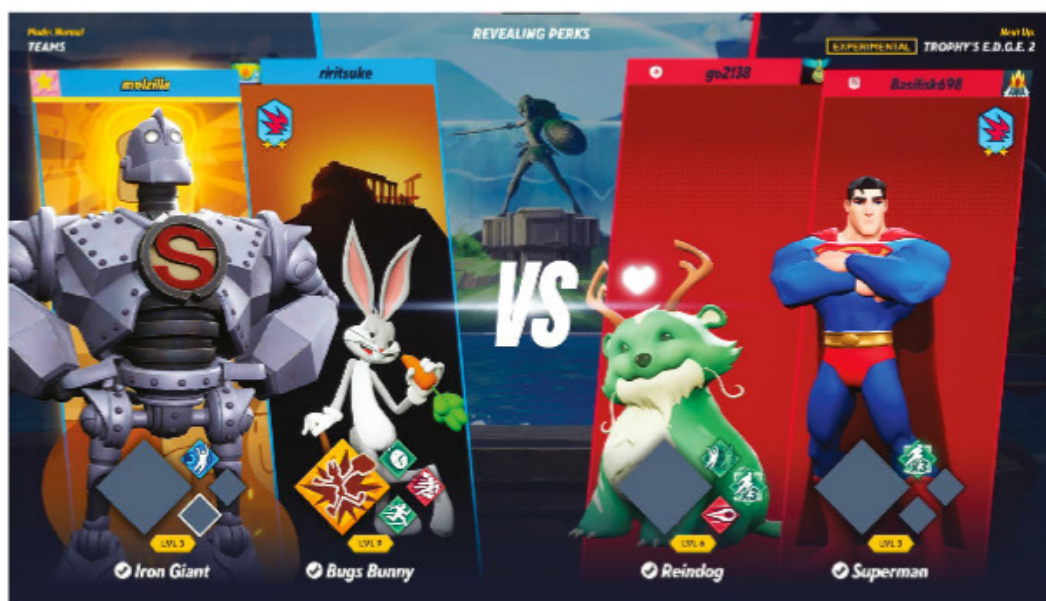
**17% BMO**  
Because who wouldn't want an adorable talking Gameboy companion?

**22% GOLD COINS**  
They've gotta be coming from somewhere!

**9% EXTRA HATS**  
For when his current one gets dirty.







**ABOVE:** You can buy or earn emotes for taunting your opponents.

**FAR LEFT:** Ten years ago this would have been the most ridiculous videogame screenshot to exist.

**LEFT:** Finn's backpack spin attack was the scourge of the game when he was in free rotation.



Famous pacifist robot Iron Giant about to give a literal child the old left-right-goodnight.



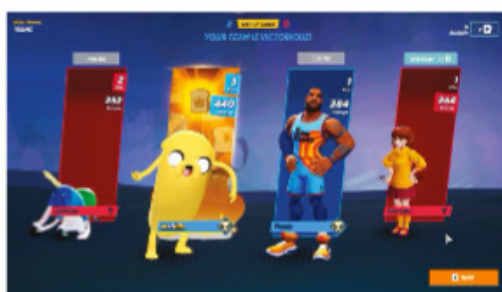


Arya Stark is a particularly odd inclusion.



**RIGHT:** LeBron James pummels enemies to death with his basketball.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Stages mostly feel a bit small and basic right now.



Wonder Woman's shield can block projectiles.



I feel like I've read this fanfiction before...



the training mode and a regular free character rotation lets you experiment with relative ease. It's also not too much of a slog to reach your first paid character, though subsequent progress slows down.

As I tinkered around with each character, I ended up taking a liking to Iron Giant. He's about twice the size of everyone else and prone to a heavy smackdown, but in return he can dish out big damage and easily shield teammates, allowing them to safely get a fair few hits in on the other team. At first I was an absolute letdown, butt-stomping my way off the map and having my car-swinging shenanigans quickly shut down. But my god, nothing was as satisfying as moments where I could finally land my big shiny metal rear on an opponent, launching them into the air as my teammate jumped and poked them straight out of the arena.

Playing each character also becomes more fun once you level them up and gain perks. Every game played with a character gives them EXP, and levelling up grants access to equippable perks that give you small buffs. You can even stack these perks with your teammate for extra benefits, which makes the pre-match setup feel a lot more strategic at higher levels. After I played around enough with Iron Giant, I was given a perk that made his rocket boots leave a trail of fire on the ground. It was a move I hadn't felt much need to use before, but once I was able to scorch my tiny nemeses beneath my feet I found myself integrating it into my play a lot more.

## PUNCHING DOWN

There are some glaring frustrations with how *MultiVersus* plays, though. Hit priority is a mess. For the uninitiated, when two moves connect the priority is given to whichever attack has more power. If both attacks hit simultaneously and have a similar power level, they'll cancel each other out. It doesn't seem to be at all present here.

Couple that with what appears to be an odd hitbox and hurtbox system, and it's a pain in the ass to contend with. I noticed this with Finn in particular

– his backpack has become a meme, having an oddly gigantic hitbox and causing him to win a lot of matchups he shouldn't. It's worth noting that the hitbox/hurtbox system is already receiving an overhaul, but right now it's a major flaw. Those at a super casual level likely won't perceive it in finer detail, but it was something that became increasingly obvious to me as I spent more time with the game.

I also have some pretty major gripes with the current map designs. Right now there are eight stages in *MultiVersus*, with two of those being variations on another existing map. I had to go and look that up just now, because I can only remember two of the stages: the Scooby-Doo and Rick and Morty ones. The latter I only recall because it was unlocked as part of a community challenge. The Scooby-Doo one, however, has the honour of being my most and least favourite stage. It's the only one I recall having some form of fun interactions – you can punch a little cog on either side of the arena to

cause a portion of the platform to disappear. It's also small, bordering on suffocating. It doesn't help that I play a character who is three times the size of the rest of the cast, but larger maps wouldn't go amiss.

Most stages consist of one main platform and then two or three smaller platforms above it. They're fine. But they feel so cramped and uninspired, like being stuck in an elevator made of bread. There are a couple of wall breaks here and there and they look pretty, but they're devoid of the levels of creativity Player First Games has managed to demonstrate through its roster.

## BABY STEPS

Unsurprisingly, *MultiVersus* is also home to a battle pass. I've never been a fan of them and this one is no different. The first season's pass has 50 tiers. There's a nice distribution of rewards throughout the tiers, but progression feels unsatisfying. I spent most of my time farming my seasonal milestones, which are randomised per player with no ability to reroll. It meant I was gunning for some ridiculous and unfun goals like ringing-out 25 opponents at less than 60 damage or connecting 200 fully charged attacks. More battle pass points per match would go a long way, along with the ability to reroll some more frustrating milestones outside of my skill level.

As it stands, *MultiVersus* has done a good job of laying the foundations for a fantastic platform fighter that has the potential to blossom into something amazing. Killer backpacks and janky hitboxes aside, each character is brimming with personality and movesets that never feel too out-of-character. It's helped by the fact that Warner Bros was able to recruit a ton of the cast's original voice actors, something that you don't see very often. It's a game not without its problems though – until hitbox and hit priorities are fixed, *MultiVersus* will continue to fall flat for people at a higher skill level. But for a game still in open beta, *MultiVersus* is a worthy competitor in the platform fighter genre. ■



## FIGHTING WORDS

A look at Velma's game plan



### STICKS AND STONES

Verbally bullies you until you spit out little pieces of evidence. Ouch.



### GET THE SCOOP

Digs up any and all dirt on you. I didn't mean to steal those sweets in 2008!



### 9-1-1

Literally narcs on you to the cops. What the hell, Velma?

PC GAMER

VERDICT

*MultiVersus* is a fun *Smash Bros* on PC that needs a little more fine-tuning to reach its full potential.

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# HURRY, CHOP CHOP

It feels good being baaad in **CULT OF THE LAMB**

By Luke Kemp

**A**t first, it looks like this is going to be a remarkably short game. Things start with you, as a cowering little lamb, being led to your death as a sacrifice. Within ten minutes however, you've already exacted violent revenge on your would-be murderers and pledged your adorable allegiance to the mysterious being that returned you to the land of the living. You start a cult of your own; a cult where all the members are super-cute creatures.

This is *Animal Crossing* if Tom Nook craved power instead of money. The first half of the game involves growing, caring for, and – of course – indoctrinating your cult. You'll need to take care of the basics before getting too ambitious, though. Your adorable little cultists need food to eat, places to sleep, and somewhere to poop. Don't give them that last one, and they'll just do it wherever they feel like it in the field you're developing. Well, they *are* animals, after all.

The second half feeds directly into the first half. There are four dungeons, which you need to complete both for the narrative (on your quest to free the one who resurrected you), and for the upkeep

of your cult (new followers and resources can be found). This part of the game is essentially a roguelike, with randomised weapons and rooms, and perks to be unlocked. Combat is solid, if sometimes a bit button-bashy when you've been given a fast but weak weapon.

**The levelling and unlock system is, quite frankly, genius**

Yet the feedback loop sees your actions in your settlement having a direct impact on your progress in the dungeons. The levelling and unlock system is, quite frankly, genius.

The fundamental idea is that the bigger and happier your cult is, the faster you can harvest their Devotion, which works as XP. This in turn either directly or indirectly unlocks weapons, perks and abilities for the dungeons, and blueprints for

## NEED TO KNOW

**WHAT IS IT?**  
A game that puts the 'cult' into 'cutlet'

**EXPECT TO PAY**  
£19

**DEVELOPER**  
Massive Monster

**PUBLISHER**  
Devolver Digital

**REVIEWED ON**  
GeForce GTX 1650,  
AMD Ryzen 5 3550H,  
8 GB RAM

**MULTIPLAYER**  
No

**LINK**  
[cultofthelamb.com](http://cultofthelamb.com)

decoration and functional buildings for your cult. Part of the progression system involves developing your cult's doctrine. While this is a binary either/or choice each time, it's still an enjoyable way to decide how reasonable/evil you want to be while gaining a new perk in the process. For example, I wanted to make sure that my followers respected the elderly, resulting in a faith boost whenever I had a member reach a certain age. That more than makes up for the cannibalism thing, right?

## SHEEPING AROUND

Yet there is even *more* to *Cult of the Lamb*. With the story done, the dungeons truly open up, no longer coming to a close when you hit what was previously the boss room. You can keep going for as long as you dare, running the risk of losing a portion of what you've collected if you die. Although, how long you play won't necessarily be your choice. There's one enemy that you can never quite defeat: time.

There's a gentle yet constant pressure to the game, in the form of the day/night cycle. Whether you're at your settlement, in one of the other

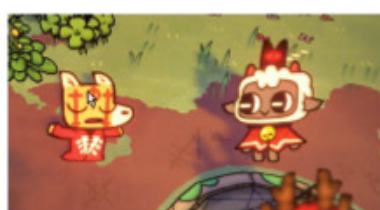


ABOVE: Save that bunny!

RIGHT: WORSHIP ME MORE! MORE!!!!





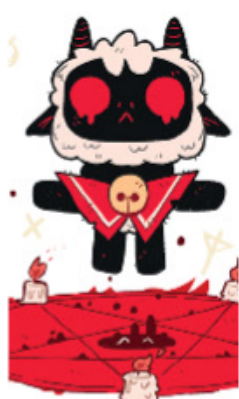


**TOP:** That's... a lot of teeth.

locations you slowly discover, or in the middle of an adventure in a dungeon, time is slowly passing. In order to keep up with the demands of your cult, you need to keep a good balance between settlement upkeep and dungeon adventuring. Nothing wrong with that, but it would be nice to have the option of leaning more heavily into one side or the other if you felt like it.

Still, *Cult of the Lamb* is wonderfully designed, and the script is sharp and funny. The atmosphere is great, helped in no small part by art which immediately endears itself to you. Speaking of which, making all of your followers adorable wickle critters was a smart choice. Intentionally or otherwise, it makes the brainwashing and murky morals amusing rather than disturbing.

Occasionally, I found myself thinking 'erm, this really *is* like a cult', such as the time the game gleefully informed me that I could marry as many of my followers as I wanted. Don't be fooled into thinking that this game is anything but great, though. I adore it, and that is almost certainly my own opinion unaffected by nefarious influences. ■

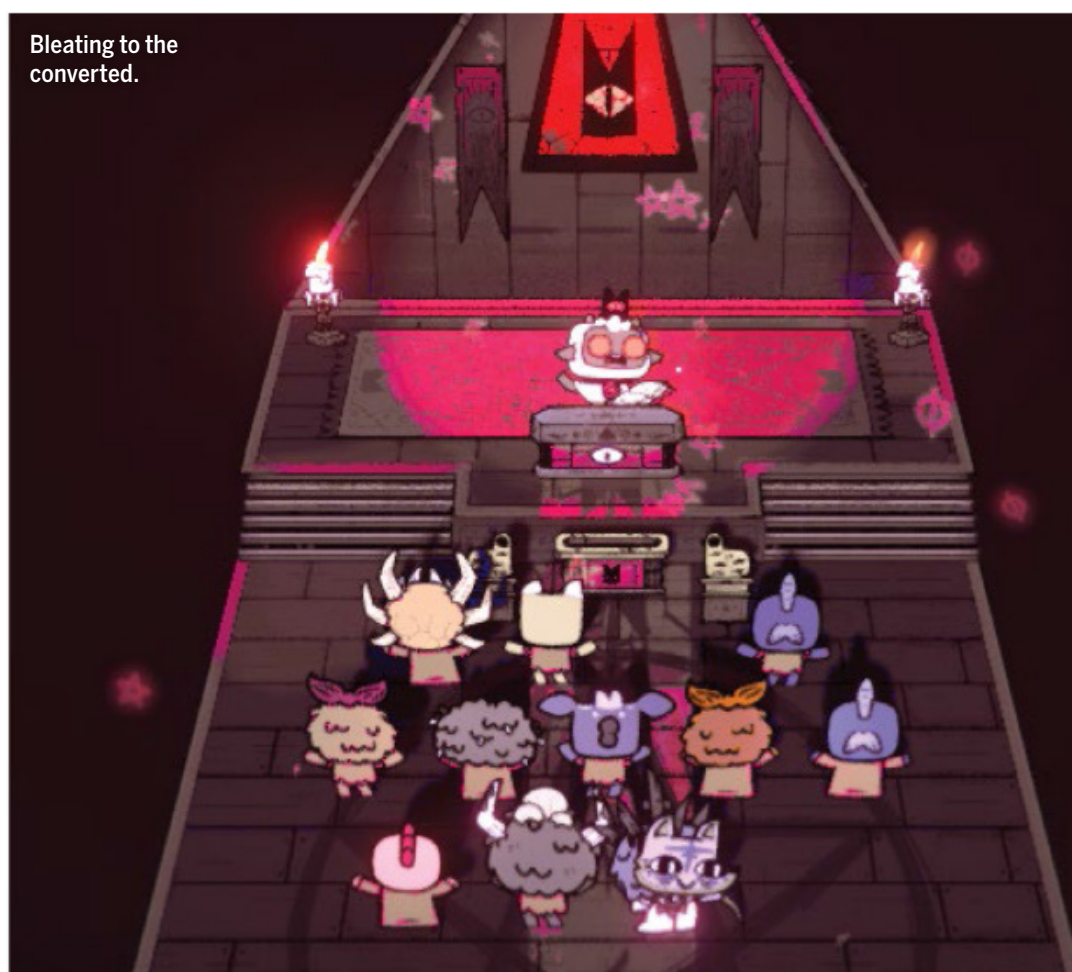


## PC GAMER VERDICT

*Cult of the Lamb* is unlike anything else in a good way, you won't feel fleeced if you buy this. Ha ha! 'Fleeced...'

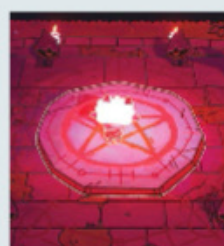
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Bleating to the converted.

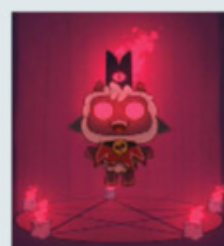


## PREPARING THE LAMB

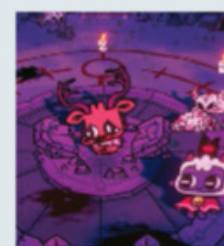
*Going from kebabee to kebaber*



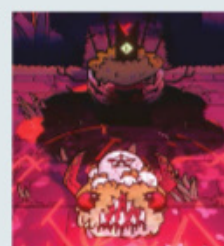
**THE EXECUTION**  
Scared and alone, thrust into the middle of a pentagram, this is surely the end for you. Right?



**THE RESURRECTION**  
Of course not! Brought back to life, you'll chew grass and kick ass, and you're all outta grass.



**THE FLOCK**  
After a successful and far-from-bloodless escape, it's time to start building that cult. Rescue helpless animals.



**KILLING TIME**  
Even though they're oddly cute, you'll need to go dungeon diving to kill all those demons in the search for goodies.



# SOULS-YIKES

I am requesting we stop making Dark Souls rip offs like **THYMESIA**

By Samantha Greer

**B**an Souls-likes. Please, for the love all that is holy, ban them. I cannot think of a sub-genre that has so thoroughly burnt itself out in so short a time while producing so little of value. Numerous imitators have come and gone while the very games they're trying to ape continue to be made. What good is a middling *Dark Souls* clone when *Dark Souls* is right there? This very year we had *Elden Ring* for goodness sake!

Of course, there is one beloved From Software property you can't play on PC (at least, outside of some wonky streaming options). *Bloodborne* has long been demanded for the platform and so, maybe, *Thymesia* has a place here? Offering players a taste of an experience beyond their reach? If it's a taste, it's no more than a mouldy breadcrumb.

Tell me if you've heard this before: in a city ravaged by plague that turns people into monsters, it's up to one gifted hunter to cleanse these foul streets. I try to take games on their own terms but *Thymesia* is nothing but a pale shadow of its obvious inspiration. Not so much wearing its influences on its sleeve as wearing their entire skin. From the protagonist looking like a cheap Halloween costume alternative to

**Animations are just a bit simplistic and lacking in the character**

*Bloodborne*'s Eileen the Crow to the hub that is obviously intended to be the Hunter's Dream and even the fonts, this is a game without an original bone in its body. That's a problem when your source material was lauded precisely because of its originality, twisting the *Dark Souls* format into something wildly different, introducing players to what seemed like a Gothic infused

romp that eventually revealed itself to be something grander and cosmic. *Bloodborne* was imaginative in so many departments, with its trick weapons and dream worlds, it leaves *Thymesia*'s flaws exposed like gaping, festering wounds.

**ELDEN BO-RING**

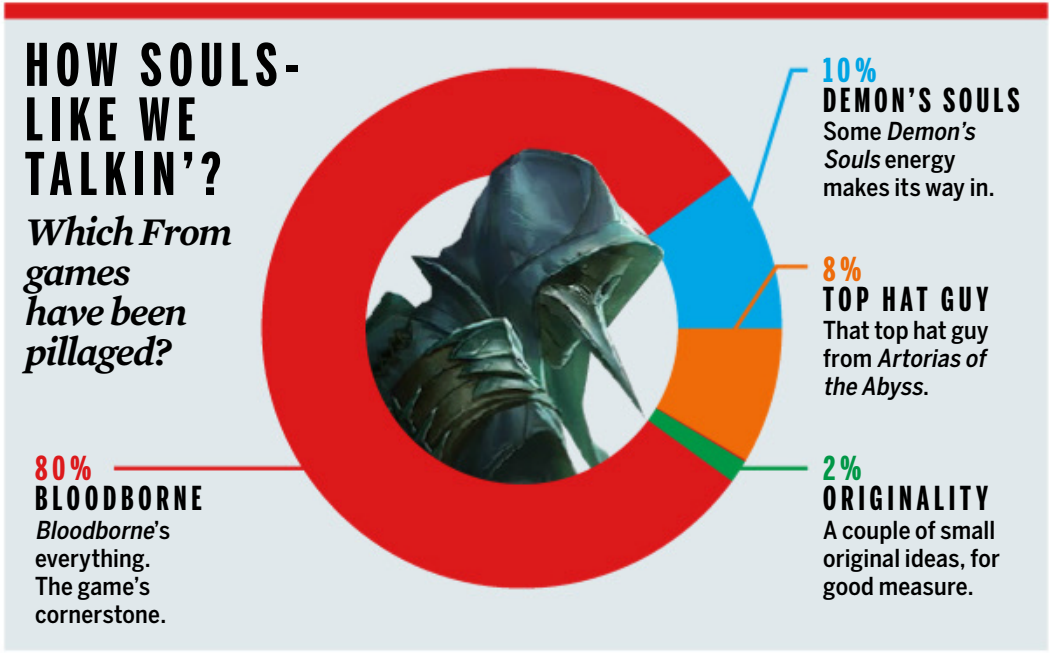
Despite a novel conceit in which you steal the essence of enemy weapons

**NEED TO KNOW**

- WHAT IS IT?**  
A gruelling action RPG
- EXPECT TO PAY**  
£20
- DEVELOPER**  
OverBorder Studio
- PUBLISHER**  
Team17
- REVIEWED ON**  
64-Bit Windows 10, Nvidia GeForce GTX 970, Intel i7-4790K, 16GB RAM
- MULTIPLAYER**  
No
- LINK**  
[team17.com/games/thymesia](http://team17.com/games/thymesia)

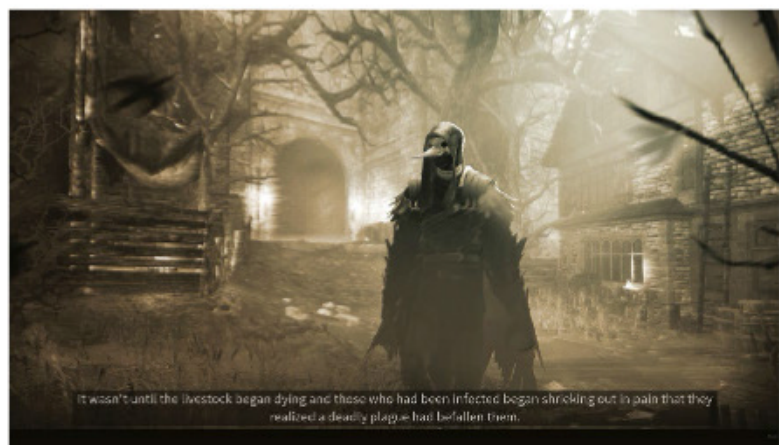
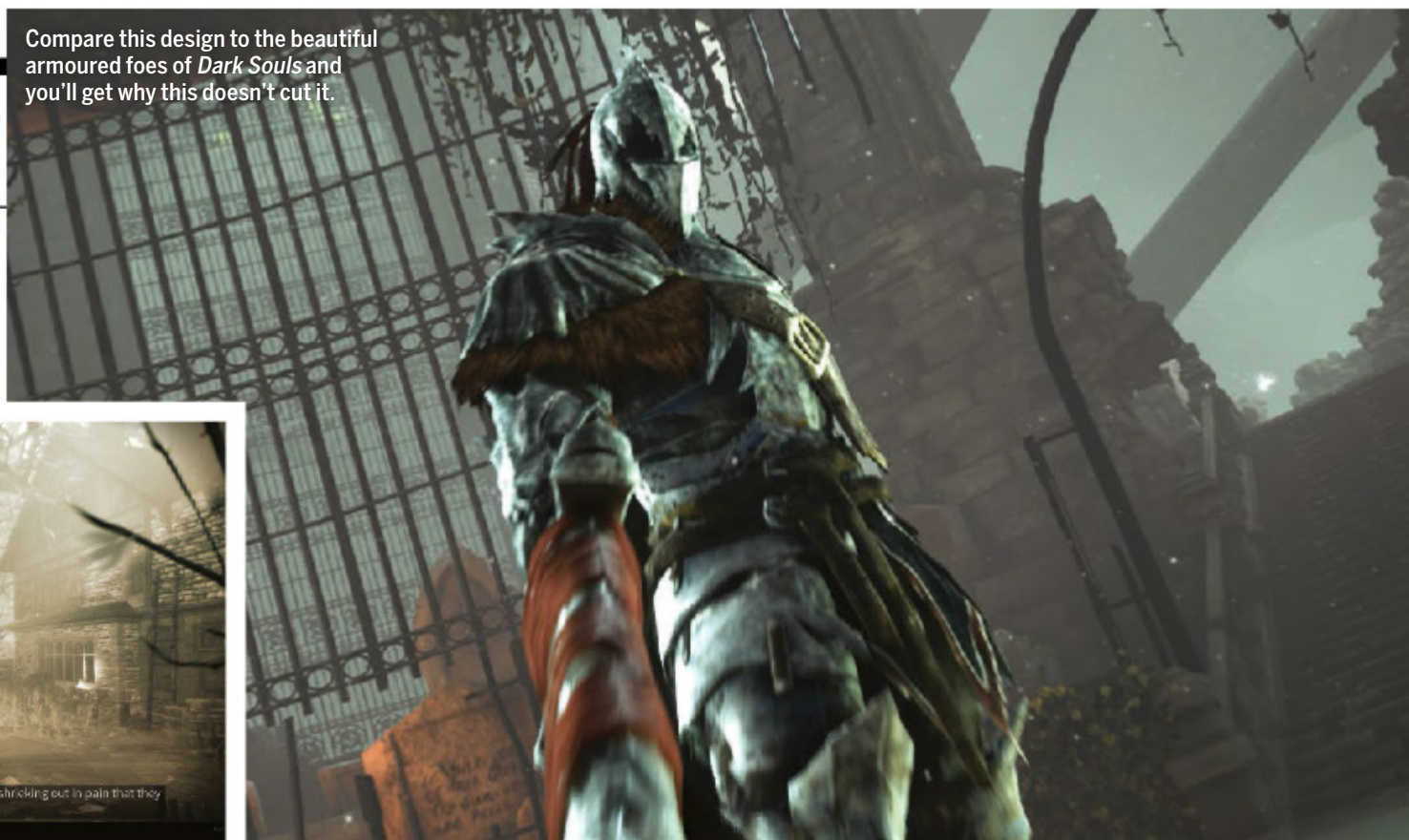
and 'summon' them at opportune moments, *Thymesia* feels bereft of the range of From's combat, ultimately treading closer to a character action game than an RPG. That's not necessarily a bad thing except for the fact combat in *Thymesia* always feels a little stiffer and a little more awkward than it should be. Animations are just a bit simplistic and lacking in the character that elevates From Software's battles into memorable encounters. The limited tools at your disposal also leave fights feeling quickly repetitive as every enemy essentially requires the same fundamental attacks in the same order, varied only in length as determined by their preposterously large health bars. Even with some upgrades, combat remains a case of spamming attacks until you get the little prompt for a follow up with your green glowing claw attack. Enemies also only take 'wounds', which means that you can knock off all their health and still not kill them. To do that, you need to use your claw to leach their power and finish them off. Failure to do so will see enemies recovering their health.

Like many bad *Souls* imitators, *Thymesia* takes difficulty to heart and expects that it's going to be the draw for many players. Even aside from the missing legwork required to make me care enough to confront difficult foes, mysteries and intrigue, *Thymesia* forgets that From Software's games build in numerous clever affordances that let players tackle enemies in clever ways to overcome the baseline difficulty. *Bloodborne* for instance would give players pebbles and Molotov cocktails, tools that could be cleverly used to manage crowds or take big chunks off an enemy health bar with ease. *Thymesia* provides you with precious few tools and instead really commits to the 'git gud' mantra of *Dark Souls* fans. There's no multiplayer either, no way to rope a friend in for the game's challenges.

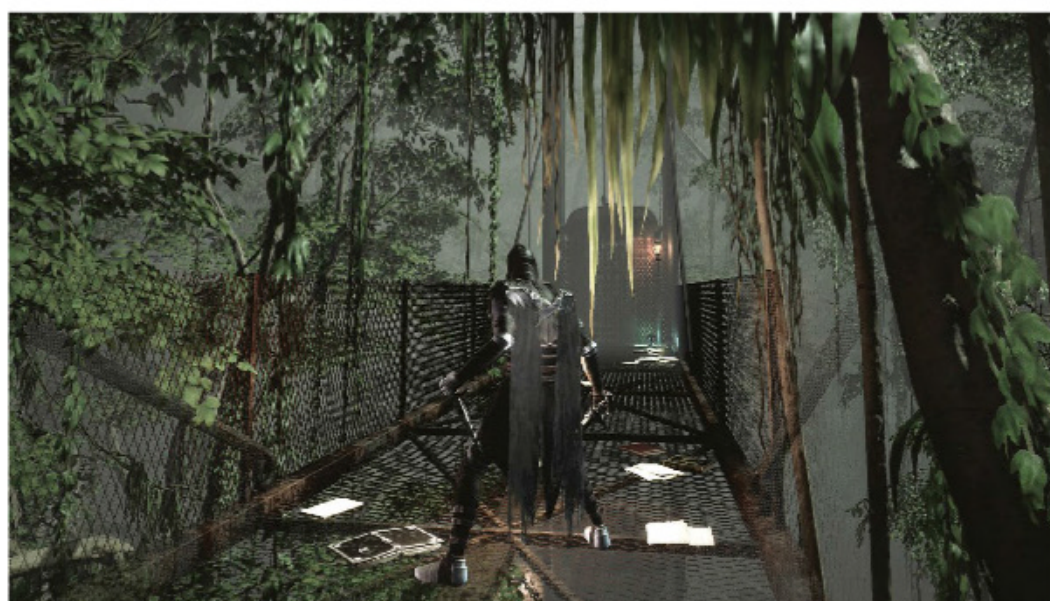




Compare this design to the beautiful armoured foes of *Dark Souls* and you'll get why this doesn't cut it.

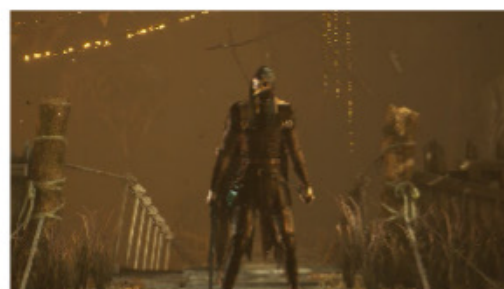


It wasn't until the livestock began dying and those who had been infected began shrieking out in pain that they realized a deadly plague had befallen them.



**FAR LEFT:** There are shades other than brown in the game, I swear.

**LEFT:** This spooky child is the equivalent of *Bloodborne's* doll but far less interesting.





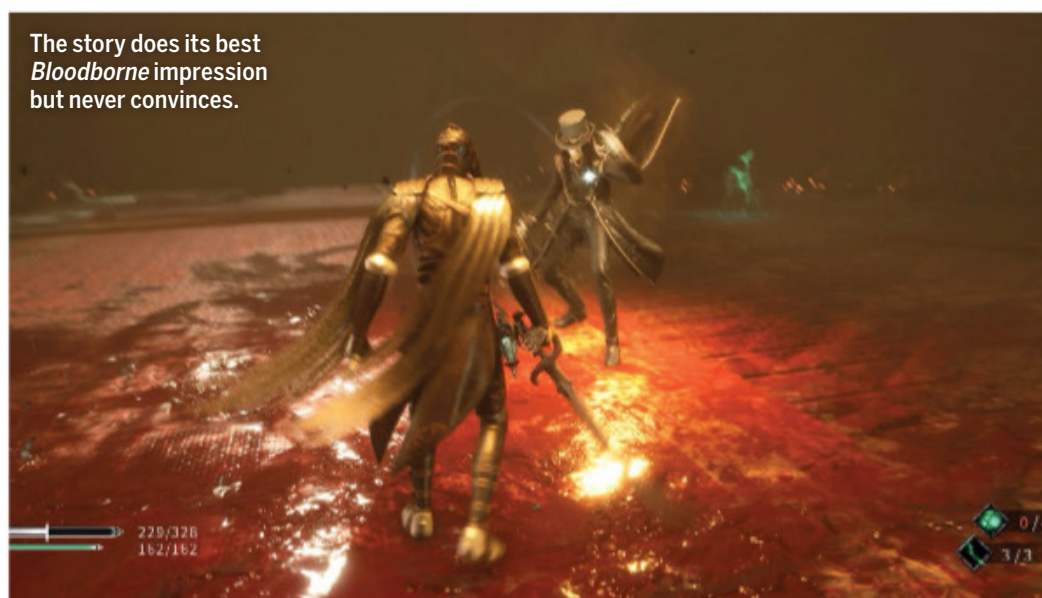


**ABOVE:** I mean at least PRETEND you didn't copy From Software's homework.

**BELOW:** In fleeting moments, the visuals do come together to make something striking.



The story does its best *Bloodborne* impression but never convinces.





» I'm not one to shrink from a challenge but the lack of options winds up just leading to tedium.

### BLOOD WELL-WORN

It goes big too quickly, offering no divergent paths for players to find challenges suited to them and instead thrusting multi-stage bosses at the first opportunity. *Dark Souls* might hide a deadly challenge early on but only as a bit of fun, a tease of what's to be overcome, not an actual test for starting players. An early boss in *Thymesia*, clearly meant to evoke the legendary clock tower fight against Maria in *Bloodborne*'s DLC, is such a showcase for the gulf between this and the original. Maria is a masterfully staged duel, her moveset evoking the hands of the clock while the fight's escalation charts her character history, giving us her story in reverse just like how we are moving backwards in time through the city's history. *Thymesia*'s fight is a school yard brawl, two amateurs slapping at each other until somebody gets hurt. There's some undercurrent about a circus and performers but it's a mild bit of flavour rather than anything compelling. Between the clumsy movement and simplistic mechanics, there isn't room for a legendary confrontation to develop. It's not terrible, it's just not especially good and really makes clear the myriad of details that make something like *Bloodborne* sing.

The game's world is as dreary as its foes, with none of the tantalising teases that From's games excel at. Its first major area, the Sea of Trees, actually resembles the Valley of Defilement from *Demon's Souls* but instead of an ever darkening descent below the earth, it's a walk around a confusing array of overlapping scaffolding. The world design is bereft of the thematic elements that make a place worth learning. There's no sense of geography or story here, only some brown assets slapped together. Some of the later areas are a little more promising but they reveal themselves to be as thoughtless as the drab starting areas.

The story itself is so obviously trying to be a From Software

'greatest hits', with ancient trees and plagues and a king who went a bit off the rails. Again, not a problem inherently. What matters is how a tale is told. Alas, *Thymesia* emulates the beats of a *Dark Souls* or a *Bloodborne* but with none of the essential subtlety. It presents few questions to the player, leaving you

with no threads to pull. Without the allure of deeper mysteries, you're only motive is simply the battles themselves. Except in a *Dark Souls* or a *Bloodborne* those things are deeply intertwined, with each

foe sketching out the world, hinting at or revealing some deeper truth. *Thymesia*'s foes were too dull or tacky to draw me in. I never cared about the fate of its world the way I did recently with *Elden Ring*'s The Lands Between or how much I really wanted to get to the bottom of the mystery of Yharnam in *Bloodborne*.

### DAFT SOULS

And god the music. It is, to be fair, the one department in which it almost completely avoids mimicking *Bloodborne*. The downside is it instead opts for a stilted score of twee melodies that feels like it would be a better fit for a *Fable* game. On repeated attempts I found these simplistic tunes to be uniquely annoying and never the kind of thing

that brought me into the game. The music isn't bad perhaps but it is another example of the game failing to coalesce into anything coherent.

### PREPARE TO SIGH

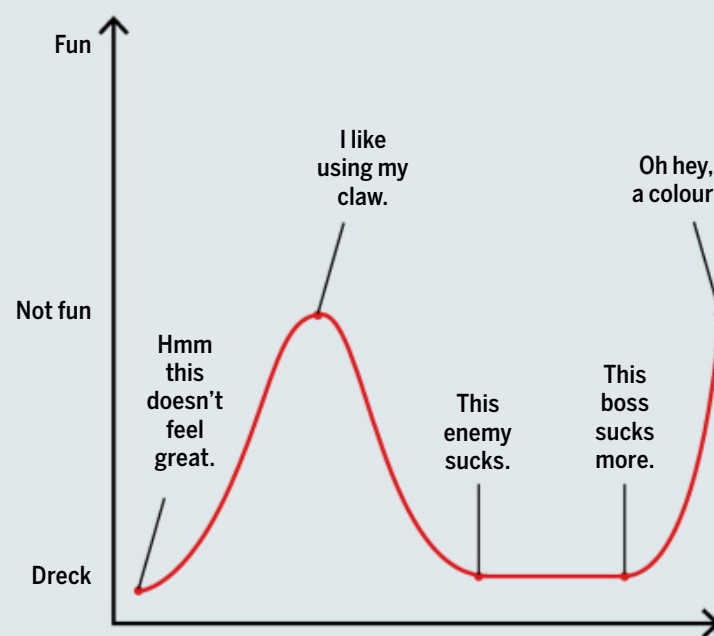
I have talked as much about *Bloodborne* throughout this review as I have *Thymesia* because there's simply no getting around it. It is someone's smash grab of another game's iconography, dragged through the mud and propped back together with Sellotape. *Thymesia* is a game clearly on a much smaller budget. It could never do all the things a big expensive title like *Bloodborne* does. So why try? Why invite this comparison? I am begging the creators of *Souls*-likes to stop chasing the ghost of their time with these lauded games and instead find their own voice. From Software isn't just the best at what it does, From's STILL DOING IT.

In what world are fans of these games starved of their finest iterations? Why would they settle for a cheap knock off? Even From Software itself has only survived by iterating and experimenting. If you want to compete with them then you need to do more than bear a fleeting resemblance. The tragedy of *Thymesia* is the glimmers of original ideas, like the wound mechanic, are all suffocated by being squeezed into the From Software template instead of explored in their own right. These ideas deserved their own game, a game which could find a thematic universe to house them in.

Reviewing these *Souls*-likes necessitates repeating myself because they keep making the same mistakes, learning the wrong lessons from games they admire but show no critical perspective of. There's a failure to understand what makes those games tick and *Thymesia* can't even manage the basics, let alone take the format in a bold new direction. Even if you're oblivious to its inspirations, this is a slog of an action RPG, devoid of charm or imagination. At least it succeeds in pursuing the joyless misery you'd expect from living through a plague. ■

### LOWER THAN BLIGHTTOWN

*The lows and lower lows of Thymesia*

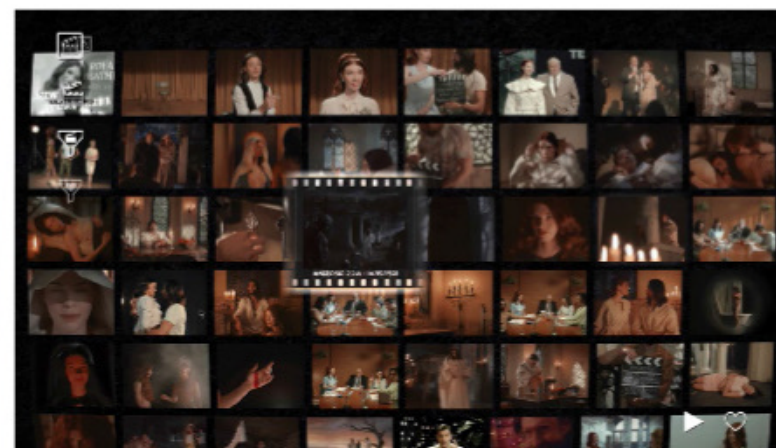


### PC GAMER VERDICT

Unfortunately *Thymesia* is no *Bloodborne* or *Dark Souls* substitute. This is definitely an ill-advised *Souls*-like.

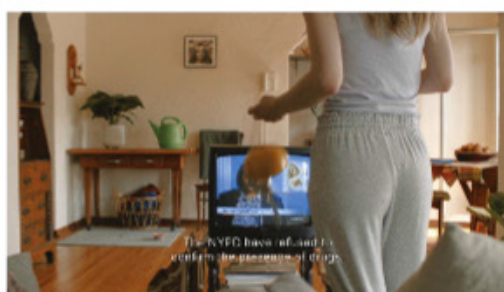
48





**RIGHT:** Bad news.

**BELOW:** Parent-teacher conference.





# NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

In **IMMORTALITY**, art is a force that creates and destroys

By Kaile Hultner

**W**here does art come from? What makes creating a film different from writing a letter or inventing the toaster? Does it come from within us, or is it, sort of, all around us, y'know? This is the realm of philosophy that *Immortality* delves into as you unravel its FMV-led mysteries. It is presented less as a game and more as a box set of forgotten (and fictional) French model and actor Marissa Marcel's filmography.

Players begin with a question posed in the Short History of Marissa Marcel, written by *Immortality* director Sam Barlow: what happened to the actor? Why has she been absent for 20 years?

Why were none of her movies released?  
Where is she now?

Luckily, the answers may lie in the large cache of film Barlow and his crew – producer Natalie Watson and

programmer Connor Carson – found back in 2020. “After carefully collating and scanning the footage,” Barlow writes, “we have created this piece of computer software in an attempt to preserve this work and share it so that Marissa may live again in the hearts of audiences.”

“The image is never a simple reality,” wrote philosopher Jacques Rancière. Likewise, the images in *Immortality* are rarely ever just what they seem. They hide things, distort meanings, and play with expectations.

Part of how *Immortality* hides things is through restraint. Unlike previous Barlow-helmed games, players do not have immediate or comprehensive access to the entirety

of the footage. Instead, they start with a single interview from a '60s-era late night talk show, and are expected to organically branch out from there. This is where the game's first major mechanic comes in: the match cut.

Match cuts are a commonly-used editing technique to build visual clarity for moviegoers. In

*Immortality*, the technique is used to find similarly-composed images across different movies and other media. By pausing the scene, players can examine small aspects of it and, like a point-and-click adventure game, click on whatever they are interested in. This will teleport them to another scene with the same actor or a similar object in it. As players teleport around, they add the scenes

**The game itself is structured like a Moviola editing machine**

## NEED TO KNOW

**WHAT IS IT?**  
An immersive interactive movie where you are the editor and the film might be haunted

**EXPECT TO PAY**  
£20/Free on PC Game Pass

**DEVELOPER**  
Sam Barlow, Half Mermaid

**PUBLISHER**  
Half Mermaid

**REVIEWED ON**  
AMD Ryzen 5 3500U, Radeon Vega Mobile Gfx 2.10 GHz, 12 GB RAM

**MULTIPLAYER**  
No

**LINK**  
halfmermaid.co

they find to their library, and gradually, the true (or ‘true’) story emerges. The match cut here acts like its cinematographic counterpart by creating narrative, instead of visual, continuity for the player.

## HIDE AND SEEK

The game itself is structured like a Moviola editing machine, and combined with the match cut mechanic, the player is able to put together their own ‘supercut’ based almost entirely on vibes. It's very satisfying to go down these rabbit holes on your way to solving the mystery at the heart of the game, and the sense that you are actively participating in this created world is bolstered by the presence of excellent background music that intensifies as you jump from scene to scene.

As a note, while there are full mouse and keyboard controls built in, the developer does recommend use of a controller. Additionally, players will want to scrub back and forth through scenes, as hints and insights can sometimes be found running the footage backwards.

Past its mechanics, *Immortality* is a remarkable game, an interrogation into the human cost of art and a teardown of the film industry's rotten treatment of women and other marginalised people, past and present. It skewers the idea of the auteur, even as it mimics the form and formats of ‘great artists’ of the past. *Immortality* may draw comparisons to films by Alfred Hitchcock or David Lynch, or even past Barlow-penned titles like *Telling Lies* or *Her Story*. That may be unavoidable. But as a game, it goes much further beyond anything it might compare to. ■

## CLASS ACT Meet some of the cast and crew



**ROBERT JONES MILES SZANTO**  
A heartthrob chosen specifically to be the Ambrosio to Marcel's Rosario/Matilda.



**CARL GREENWOOD TY MOLBAK**  
A James Dean type whose charisma is matched by his playfulness.



**JOHN DURICK HANS CHRISTOPHER**  
Director of photography on Ambrosio.



**MARISSA MARCEL MANON GAGE**  
Timeless, ageless, the true star of this and every show.



**ARTHUR FISCHER JOHN EARL ROBINSON**  
Director who claims to have ‘discovered’ Marcel.

## PC GAMER VERDICT

*Immortality* is Sam Barlow's best, most thought-provoking game yet, and a barnstorming debut for Half Mermaid.

95



# DEADGOOD

**HARD WEST 2's** mix of turn-based tactics and supernatural cowboys is a humdinger

By Ian Evenden

**J**ust about anything can be made better by the addition of the supernatural. Pirates of the Caribbean exploited a winning formula with its ghostly buccaneers, *Stranger Things* puts the demons in D&D, and *Hard West* has hit a home run with its tales of the weird Wild West. An *XCOM*-like tactics game, except when it isn't, *Hard West 2* brings some up-to-date ideas to the poker table.

It starts with a train, as many of the best things do. You're robbing it, naturally, and having done your research you're sure there aren't many guards. 'You' in this case are Gin Carter, a horse-riding, hat-wearing, six-shooter aficionado who's the nominal leader of a band of outlaws. This train heist is gonna make him rich, you'll see. With him are Laughing Deer, Native American melee specialist, Flynn, who keeps to the shadows, and trick-shooter Kestrel Colt.

The train guards don't stand a chance, except there are more of them than you expected. Happily, you have certain advantages, which stand you in good stead throughout the game. The first is that your characters have three action points rather than the traditional two. This means they can move, heal, and still shoot. Or sprint into cover and hunker down for a better chance of evading incoming fire.

### LUCK OF THE DRAW

Trick shots mean ricocheting your bullets off hard surfaces to negate the effect of cover, essentially outflanking the enemy with unfairness. To facilitate this, wheelbarrows, piles of junk and non-explosive barrels are scattered around levels. You can even ping a bullet off the hanging light fitting within a building. Then there's luck, the addition of which

makes your attacks more accurate. It's bravado, though, that makes the biggest difference. Kill an enemy, and your action points are refilled. It's so simple, but affects battles in a profound way. Suddenly they're chains to be yanked on, to see how far they go. Living enemies are stepping stones to your objective at the risk of becoming overextended and being cut to pieces on the next turn (though not for those who follow, who can be left behind by a character on a killing spree).

**Kill an enemy, and your action points are refilled**

### NEED TO KNOW

**WHAT IS IT?**  
Supernatural cowboy turn-based tactics

**EXPECT TO PAY**  
£24

**DEVELOPER**  
Ice Code Games

**PUBLISHER**  
Good Shepherd Entertainment

**REVIEWED ON**  
Threadripper 2950X, Geforce RTX 3080 10GB, 64GB RAM

**MULTIPLAYER**  
No  
**LINK**  
[hardwestgame.com](http://hardwestgame.com)

This, at least in the early stages, means Laughing Deer is a killing machine. Get him in close, add a dose of luck, and he can club anyone to death, instantly refilling his AP to move on to the next hapless victim. Luck will eventually run out, and enemies with more health arrive, but he still hits hard and it's all too easy to leave him unprotected, standing miles away from cover or allies, when the turn ends just because you were having too much fun tearing through bad guys and listening to the voice actor yell.

### RED HOT POKER

Back on the train, and you've made your way up to the driver's compartment. The loco goes into a tunnel, everything goes black. When it comes out the other side, it's crawling on hundreds of centipede-like metal legs, which is unusual in a steam train. There, stoking the boiler, is a man who turns out to have some interesting powers of his own, eventually revealing himself to be Mammon, the devil incarnate. And he wants to play poker.

Of course you play. Of course you lose. The stakes were only your very soul (to be fair, if you'd won he'd have given you the centi-train, which was pretty tempting, and he seemed like a trustworthy guy). The loss of your soul, interestingly, stops you from casting a shadow. We're not sure how that works.

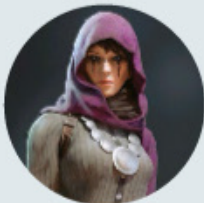
You wake up in the overworld map, a departure from the *XCOM*-alike base-building globe, and something more like *Total War's* strategy layer mixed with a 2D RPG. You wander around up here, discovering towns, mines and weird things next to the road, generally getting yourself into trouble and switching into the turn-based combat mode to get yourself out of it again. You dig up (sometimes quite literally) new members of your posse with new abilities, have short conversations, make decisions like

## FOUR OF THE GANG

The mainstays of your six-element crew



**GIN CARTER**  
Shoots through cover. Plays poker badly, especially against devils.



**FLYNN**  
Weird magic woman. Never ask her to swap places with you.



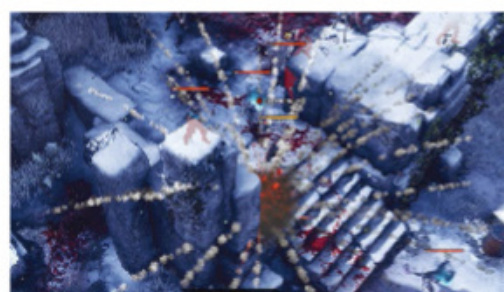
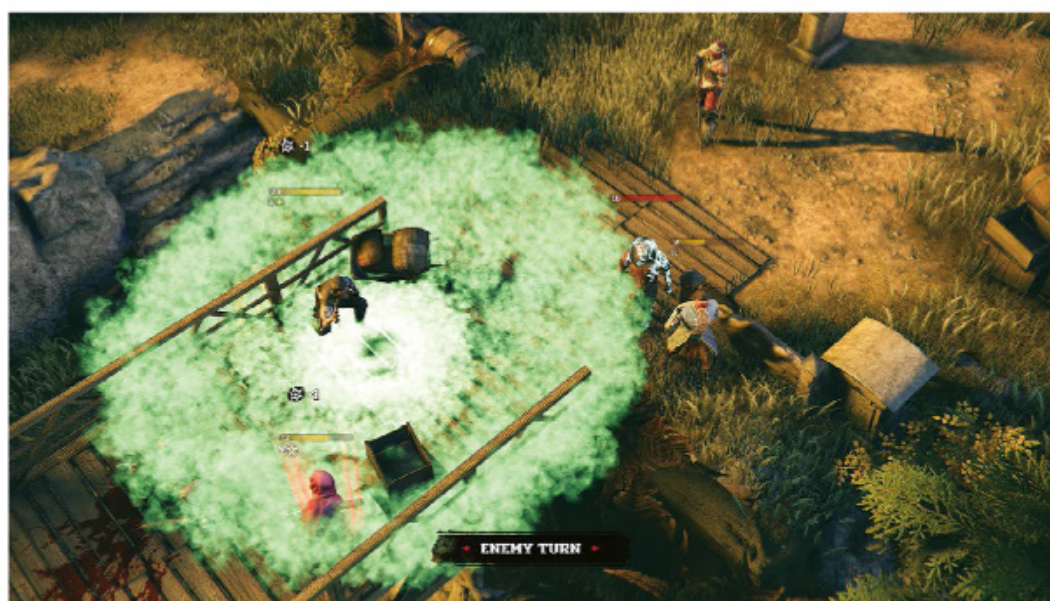
**OLD MAN BILL**  
Dead, but got better. Primarily made out of other people's bullets.



**LAUGHING DEER**  
Can he actually see through all that war paint? No  
Eye Deer.



The 2D cutscenes have a stark visual style.



**FAR LEFT:** If you think we're above fart jokes in PC Gamer, you've another stink coming.

**BELOW:** This trick shot uses the candle ring hanging from the ceiling.







Where we're going we don't need... rails?



**FAR RIGHT:** That is not dead which can eternal lie. Squaawk!

**BELOW:** These boys were trying to hang Laughing Deer. And now they're sorry.



**BILL:** "Whoever did this didn't kill him for his things, Carter."

**GDE:** "At least this one isn't a bitar. When, for a second there I thought maybe old Death had taken a holiday in this frozen hellhole. You're the expert. What do you think about this?"

**GDE:** "Burr?"

**BILL:** "This is a work of a killer. A real rat job or a cutthroat. I took some of them down back in my day."

"We might stumble across more of these crosses. We better beware."

OLD MAN BILL Loyalty +1

I GDE Let's just go. This ain't our business





whether to take supplies or leave them for the starving villagers, and investigate the uncanny. Mammon and his centipede express to Hell are still out there somewhere, making a mockery of both timetables and 19th century engineering practices as they thunder through the countryside. Killing him could get you back your soul. It's worth a try, anyway. And it might be fun.

For now, though, it's cold. Heading to a town would be good, as there might be shops there to tool up on new weapons, but first we need to check out that old hut by the side of the road.

## GANG BANG

Once you've built up a few extra members to your posse, you can start thinking about different ways to approach missions. The game shares more with *Desperados III* than a setting and a liking for the quicksave key (as of patch 1.5, anyway), giving each character special abilities. Gin Carter has a short-ranged skill that can shoot through cover, damaging every enemy within its area of effect. Flynn can swap places with any character at the cost of one hit-point each, great for pulling an entrenched enemy out of cover or finishing off bad guys with just a sliver of health left. Others have more eldritch endowments to play with.

Eventually you'll unlock a gang of six outlaws, each with their own skills and inventory, ready to tear into the riflemen, shotgunners, exploding drunks (grenade launchers with apparently infinite ammunition), zombies and witches who infest every rickety wooden structure. *Hard West 2* can live up to its name, as enemies are plentiful and eventually tough. They start off killable with one shot, but pretty soon double their hit points, bringing your bravado-fuelled rampages to an end unless you spend some time softening them up first. Characters can hold two weapons, plus throwables, each of which will have a different AP cost, deciding whether or not you can afford to move and still use your rifle (you won't – rifles take all three action points to fire, but their damage and range are unmatched).

Shotguns and explosives have an area of effect, and can hurt your allies. Killing an ally, however, can trigger bravado, so perhaps it's worth it, especially as members of your team never really die, coming back to life after the battle with one hit point ready for a trip to the surgeon, if you've got the cash.

Then there are the cards, which you'll pick up occasionally as you wander round the map. They're normal playing cards, only slightly enchanted, and on their own can add extra hit points, luck or speed.

But this is the Old West, so giving a character a valid poker hand gets you something extra. Holding two pair may unlock an ability, but a full house levels it up and a royal flush makes it even better. It can help to have a poker guide or Wikipedia to hand while doling out cards, unless you're an actual cowboy.

Take Laughing Deer. He needs to hold a pair to unlock his Wild Run ability, which adds extra damage for every two squares he charges into battle. Add extra cards for a flush and an area of effect war cry is added to daze nearby enemies, while a straight flush increases base damage and gives allies a perk. Sending him zig-zagging across the level in a maximum-range killing spree among

spread-out enemies, and watching the fires of bravado ignite each time he clubs another rifleman to the ground, is among one of the most satisfying sights the game has to offer.

## BOOM TOWN

Less satisfying, however, are the things you'd expect to happen but which don't. Throwing a stick of dynamite should have a devastating effect on structures, which look lightly built and tinder dry. It does not. Area of effect attacks are two-dimensional, limited to the level you're on and not affecting those immediately above or below, something especially frustrating with shotguns, which you should be able to use to knock someone off a rooftop. And cover can't be blown away or vaulted over, though your characters do a good job of pathfinding the rest of the time, scaling ladders and bursting through windows. Replay value may be limited, as levels are more like puzzles to be solved, enemy positions not mixing up if you take another shot at them, and there's no multiplayer to enjoy.

Given time, enemies appear who have the same sort of supernatural abilities as your characters, which feels like cheating on their part as their hit points return to normal after a flurry of gunfire. Other enemies like to charge in and start lobbing unending numbers of grenades everywhere, causing your characters to bleed their own hit points alarmingly fast. There are ways to mitigate this, of course, the Heads Down manoeuvre stopping the bleeding and food to build your points back up, but they all take action points to use.

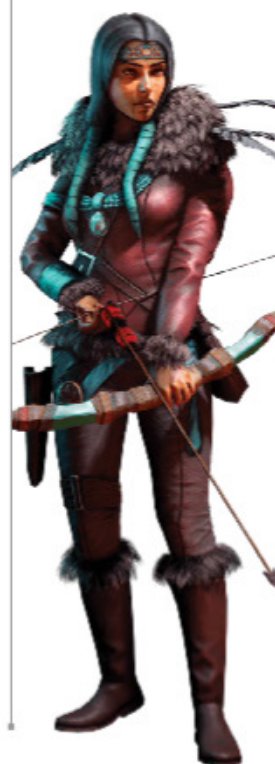
None of that really matters though, as *Hard West 2* is as solid as the safe in the town's bank. The one the outlaws have elaborate plans to rob. The combat is crunchy, the bits in-between don't outstay their welcome, and the whole supernatural cowboy setting still has just enough shine on it to be engrossing. There's more than enough room in our town for a game like this. ■

## PC GAMER VERDICT

*Hard West 2* is a superb tactics game that totally looks like an *XCOM* clone but it really, really isn't, so stop comparing.

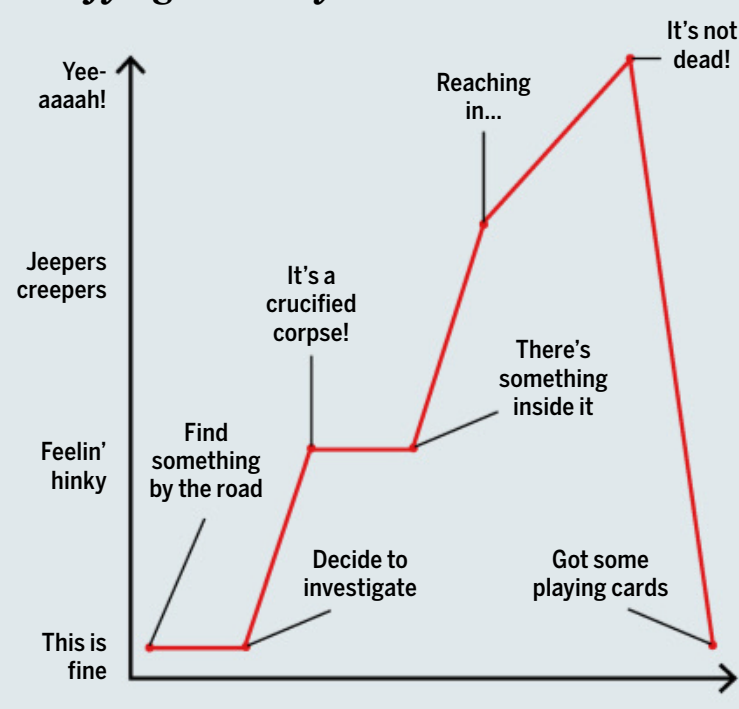
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## A full house levels it up and a royal flush makes it even better



## CURVE OF TERROR

Objects by the roadside may appear less terrifying than they are

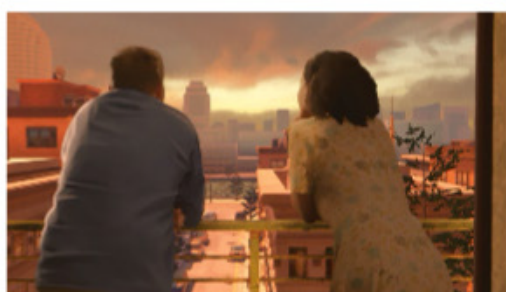






**ABOVE:** "I wish they hadn't installed the windshield at an angle."

**RIGHT:** What a lovely couple, I hope nothing bad happens to them.



Sometimes, you sweep a scene for interactive areas.



Beer there, drunk that.



# FALLING FOR IT

**AS DUSK FALLS** is a page-turner without pages

By Luke Kemp

**O**n the face of it, this is a hard sell to the videogame crowd. There's no direct control over an avatar. You complete QTEs and make choices, and... that's about it, really. Yet the limitations of the format are transformed into strengths here. You may initially mourn the loss of the ability to spin on the spot and jump around on tables during poignant dialogue, but once you're playing? You'll want little more than to see what happens next.

The story concerns two very different families brought crashing together during a small-town motel siege. To explain much more than that would run the risk of spoilers which, in a game like this, could tear holes through the experience.

As a motion comic, there's almost no full animation present. Instead, what are essentially comic panels are presented one after the other with subtle fade-in transitions. I worried that this would break the atmosphere for me, but I got used to it almost straight away.

Two words that constantly pumped through the heart of the game during my playthrough were intimacy, and pace. I quickly began to care about all of these people and what happened to them, and more than once I found myself agonising over a decision. I felt close to the people; close to the story; close to making a decision that I would regret. Similarly, with no possibility of the player becoming lost or distracted in the game world, the

developer has huge control over the pace of the story – and they nail it.

I didn't even mind the quick time events. Hell, I *liked* them. It amuses me greatly that the game features

not one, but two dishwashing QTEs, but other than that, their inclusion makes sense, and often even adds to a scene's tension. Trying to escape a pursuer over rough terrain; hurriedly hotwiring a car; getting

a stubborn bit of food off a plate; you know, that sort of thing.

**I began to care about these people and what happened to them**

## DAFFY DUSK

It probably sounds like I love *As Dusk Falls*, and that's because I do. However, when you love somebody, you have a duty to point out any important mistakes that they make. This is why I have to say that the ending is pretty shit.

I'm so frustrated with it, it's made me swear in a review for the first time in five years of freelancing. I'm talking specifically about the final scene; the scene that everybody gets regardless of any choices they made

## NEED TO KNOW

**WHAT IS IT?**  
A comic that you play – and really, really care about

**EXPECT TO PAY**  
£25

**DEVELOPER**  
Interior/Night

**PUBLISHER**  
Xbox Game Studios

**REVIEWED ON**  
GeForce GTX 1650,  
AMD Ryzen 5 3550H,  
8 GB RAM

**MULTIPLAYER**  
Yes

**LINK**  
asduskfalls.com

beforehand. The scene that plays out no matter who's dead, arrested, divorced, or forgot to do the dishes. It's cheap, it's lazy, and I hate it. Sticking that scene on the end of *As Dusk Falls* is like supergluing a Funko Pop to the hood of a Rolls Royce.

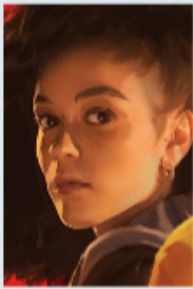
Nonetheless, I still liked the way that my first attempt at the story turned out. Events and relationships ended in a messy, realistic way that I wish I could share with you, and as the credits rolled, I was already thinking about what I'd do differently next time, the ending I'd like to see, and how I might get there.

There were a few bumps in the road on the way to that final sequence, but they were more potholes providing brief shakes than landmines that sent the wheels flying off. For example, the main disadvantage of the visual presentation, and one that could not be sidestepped entirely, is that static faces cannot express emotion as effectively as faces in motion. Most of the time, this wasn't an issue. But on a few occasions – usually when a character was caught mid-grimace in anger – expressions were unintentionally amusing.

It also has to be said that the handful of flashback sequences, while as excellently put together as the rest of the game, are robbed of a degree of tension simply because you already know that one or more of the characters don't die. I'm pretty much scraping the bottom of the criticism barrel here though.

If you're looking for a strong story that you'll want to replay at least once, and/or something to tide you over until we get that dishwashing simulator we're all waiting for, this is very much your game. ■

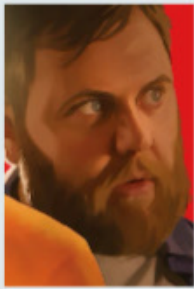
## KNOCK KNOCK Who's there? Three of the main characters



**ZOE WALKER**  
Just six years old at the beginning of the story, the final chapter sees Zoe as a young woman dealing with (some of) the consequences of your choices.



**JAY HOLT**  
A timid lad forced into rapidly escalating criminal activity, just how timid and innocent he is by the time his story comes to a close is up to you.



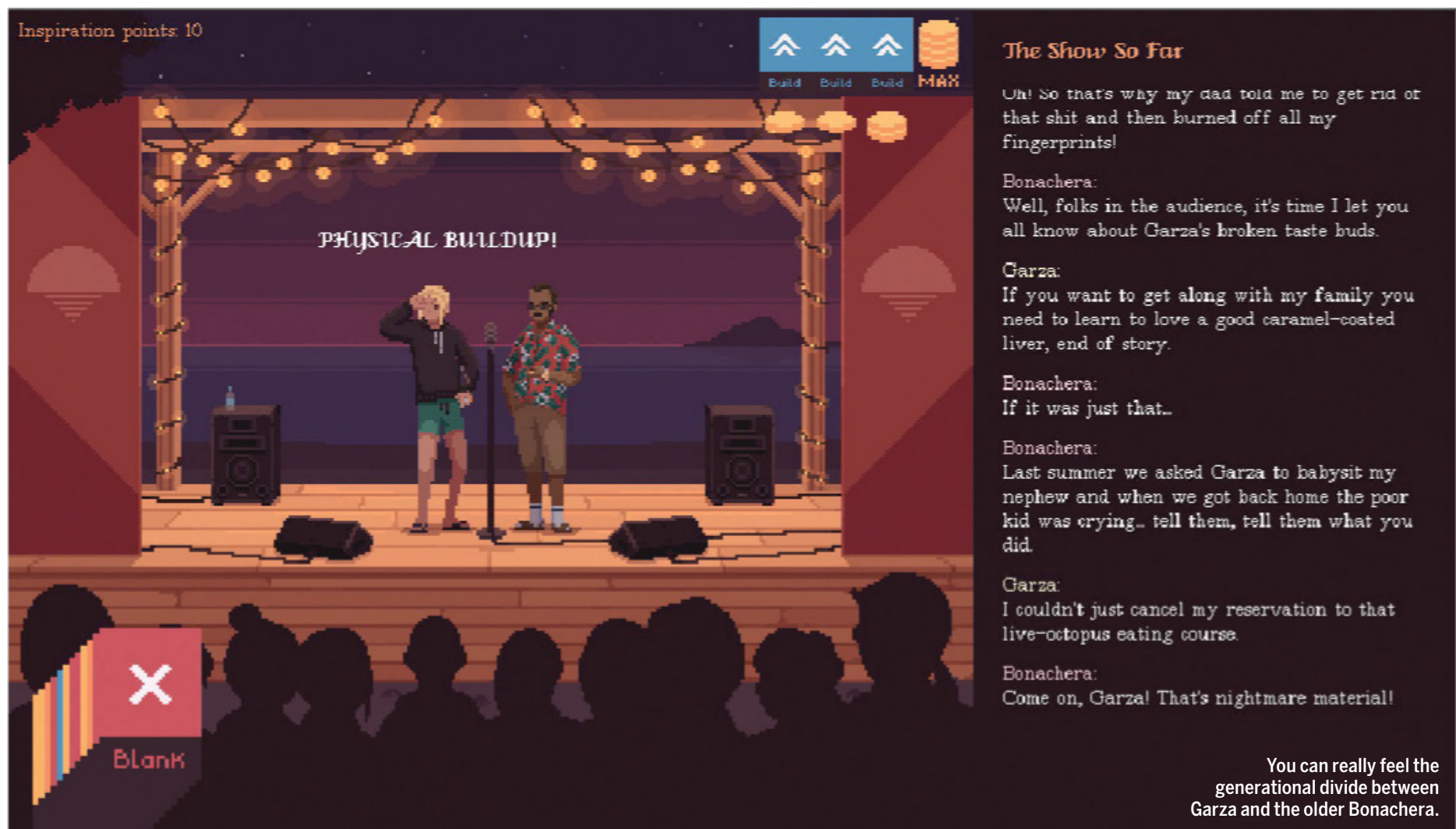
**VINCENT WALKER**  
Father to Zoe, husband to Michelle. He starts to re-evaluate his life while trying to survive. Sounds a bit like Batman.

## PC GAMER VERDICT

*As Dusk Falls* is a gripping experience, despite an ending that is the equivalent of kicking itself up the arse.

**80**





# GIG ECONOMY

Everyone's a comedian in stand-up adventure game **DE TRES AL CUARTO**

**C**omedians Bonachera and Garza are partners, onstage and off. It's a recipe for tension that *De Tres al Cuarto* duly delivers on – and if you're wondering what the title means, it's a Spanish phrase referring to something of low value. The game is partly a hands-off adventure game where you learn about their relationship, and watch it unfold over several nights, but it's also a series of interactive comedy gigs.

Playing as Garza, the younger and newer half of the double act, your job is to supply the punchlines to Bonachera's setups, building up his routines or delivering knockout follow-ups as the game allows. You're restricted by cards, which are dealt out during every gag, and for your every response you're given three cards to choose from, including Poor, Punch and Build.

Why would you choose a Poor response? Or even the Blank card, which makes you flub the line? Well, sometimes you get three Poor cards, or two Poores and a Blank, for example. It's a card game, so it's down to the luck of the draw.

There is a basic deckbuilding element. Cash earned from shows

can be used to remove bad cards, upgrade them, or buy additional ones. Eventually, over the dozen evenings that comprise the game, you'll go from sucking to sucking slightly less at the double act. Or you will if you're me, anyway.

**Your job is to supply the punchlines to Bonachera's setups**

### DOUBLE TROUBLE

It may be intentional that Garza and Bonachera are not actually that funny, but I wouldn't have been able to tell the Poor

responses from the Punch (better) ones if they hadn't been labelled as such, and if the crowd hadn't clapped *slightly* more for the Punch cards. The sound design badly mangles the shows, emphasising the soundtrack and the ambient sounds of the Menorcan shore over the audience's

### NEED TO KNOW

**WHAT IS IT?**  
A deckbuilding adventure game exploring a comedy double act's relationship

**EXPECT TO PAY**  
Free

**DEVELOPER**  
Deconstructeam

**PUBLISHER**  
Devolver Digital

**REVIEWED ON**  
Intel Core i7-10750H, 16GB RAM, GeForce RTX 2060

**MULTIPLAYER**  
No

**LINK**  
[bit.ly/DeTres](http://bit.ly/DeTres)

applause, and not creating the atmosphere of a comedy gig as a result. I didn't mind playing through the comedy sections – but I was doing it to reach the aftershow.

After every performance, we spend some time with the duo, picking what activity they get up to that evening. It might be heading to a bar, going back to their hotel room, or taking a walk, and it's refreshing to see a game explore a gay, established relationship in a mature way. These are vividly drawn characters that feel like believable human beings, although this is as much due to what they *don't* say as what they do.

In a story about the unsaid, this narration feels essential, giving their relationship huge emotional weight. This is a fresh, original interactive story, and also somehow a basic deckbuilding game. You'll put up with the lesser comedy sections – the payoff is worth it. ■

### PC GAMER VERDICT

An insightful game about relationships and a novel deckbuilder. The former is more accomplished than the latter.

**78**



BELOW: Your neighbour pops over when you go outside. Can she be trusted?



#### NEED TO KNOW

EXPECT TO PAY  
Free

DEVELOPER  
Yumii

LINK  
[bit.ly/HomeYumii](http://bit.ly/HomeYumii)

## HOME ALONE

Solving puzzles isn't a chore in **HOME**

**I**n Hitchcock's classic *Rear Window*, you spend most of the film unsure if the bloke in the opposite building is a killer or not. *Home* takes a similarly long time to reveal its hand. Is it just a game about doing chores, or will it turn into a horror game?

Not that it ever gets *too* intense – on either side of the equation – and I like it for that. As a child staying in their house alone, you have to tick chores off a to-do list, and there's a cosy, homely feel to the game as you gather laundry, take the rubbish out and feed the dog.

The backstory is fun: you're too young to go to an escape room, so your folks have set you up some simple puzzles to complete at home. There are a couple of locked doors that need codes, and the answers are somewhere inside the house.

While it's not as richly detailed as its semi-namesake *Gone Home*, by poking around you are able to get a sense for the people living here, including the detective-obsessed protagonist, who even has one of those serial killer corkboards on the wall of their bedroom. The puzzles aren't overly complicated, but mainly an excuse to fully explore the house, before *Home* lays its cards on the table at the end of the game.

At the risk of spoiling the end a tiny bit, it was refreshing to play a horror-adjacent game that knows the value of restraint. In fact, *Home* ends before anything bad happens, with one of two endings that decide the fate of the protagonist. It's not a scary game, but these endings do add a bit of gravity, much like the climax of *Rear Window* – a swerve to end the tale on a thrilling note. ■

73

## LEAF IT OUT

Make like a tree and get out in **HER TREES**

**B**efore survival games came along and asked us to fill our pockets with the entire contents of a forest, adventure games were the most item-hungry genre around. But there's value in stripping it back to just the mouse cursor and some puzzling things, as *Myst* proved. That trend continues in adventure game *Her Trees*.

There are no keys or other items to collect. Instead, your inventory is letters of the alphabet – A to I – which you have to type in as the solution to every puzzle. Finding these passcodes is the tricky and quite ingenious bit, as clues are hidden in every orifice, in twisty bones or bits of twig, in empty pint glasses or torn-up missives. Sometimes the letters themselves are hidden, waiting to be revealed as you puzzle around, or sometimes clues

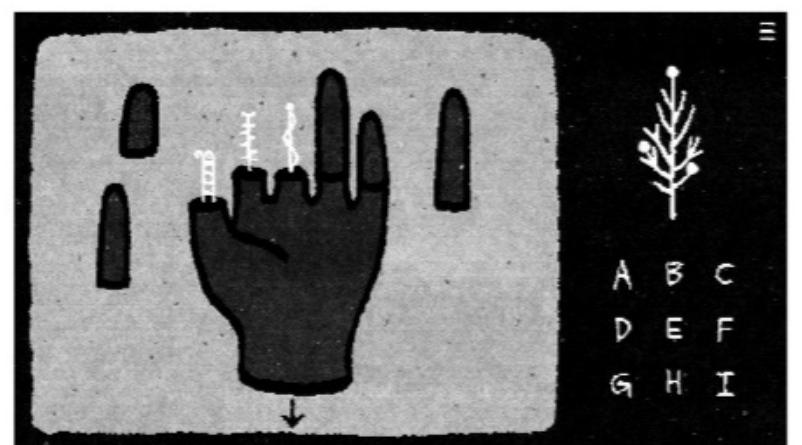
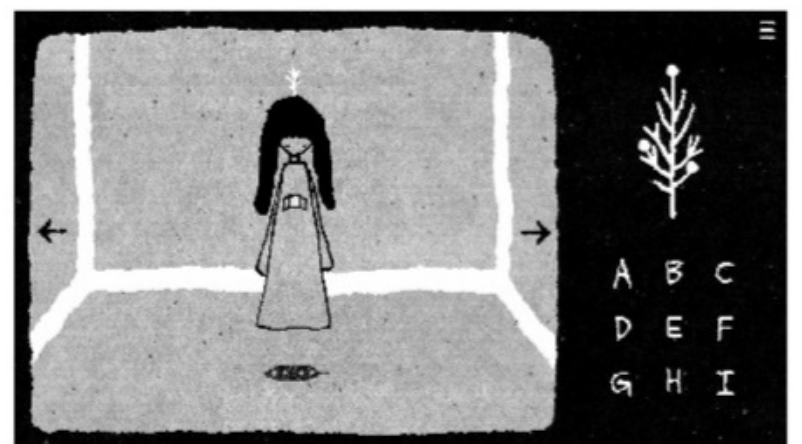
take the form of diagrams that you can use as a guide to the alphabet grid in the corner of the screen.

You discover these clues not by pulling levers or pressing buttons or twisting dials, but by dragging items around with the mouse, experimenting by piling this thing on that thing or moving this die by that die to form a pattern. The information is all there, you just need to piece it together, to arrange the constituent parts so they're *just so*.

The puzzles are clever, and all stuffed in one small and elegant room-escape style environment. You'll solve tough little puzzles as you turn to every corner of the room, filling in a tree and revealing an ending that is brief and baffling. *Her Trees* has a soothing atmosphere and lightly macabre puzzling making it a great place to linger. ■

79

BELOW: I'm guessing the trees are hers.



#### NEED TO KNOW

EXPECT TO PAY  
Free

DEVELOPER  
Stone

LINK  
[bit.ly/HerTrees](http://bit.ly/HerTrees)



The conversational equivalent of going to an elite-level RPG area too soon.



# FAIR COPOTYPE

I'm sorry for playing **DISCO ELYSIUM** wrong

**M**ost of the time, videogames let us hide behind a haze of false efficacy, fooling us that we could do astonishing things like reload a gun or do a chin-up. But *Disco Elysium* is different. It knows us. And, worse still, it knows we know it knows us, and it uses that cursed information like an emotional blackjack.

It's never more obvious than in the moments where you try to pick the dramatic, cool options. Yes, there's a chance you'll defeat that wall of fascist muscle with a breathtaking disco spin kick; it's just a gratuitously small one. Meanwhile, if you try to deal with anxiety-inducing horrors the game flings at you as you would in real life, it's no less merciless. On my first playthrough I was branded 'Sorry Cop', on account of my need to apologise to everyone. Returning to that save now makes me want to say sorry to past me for being so spineless, like some sort of hand-wringing temporal ouroboros of perpetual meekness, disappearing up my own pinched backside. I'd love to tell you that it's all worth it. That actually, the cracked

mirror *Disco Elysium* holds up to your psyche will enrich and improve you as a person. That in order to rebuild you must first be torn down. But it more often feels like a public information film about the dangers of overconfidence. "Yes, you might think you want to be a big-shot. But have you considered the danger of accidentally telling your new partner your name is Raphaël Ambrosius Costeau?" On no conceivable level does this mean that *Disco*

**In order to rebuild you must first be torn down**

*Elysium* is anything other than intoxicatingly brilliant. It's just that it challenges you on an entirely different level. So what if you can boss the fifth Pantheon in *Hollow Knight*? This is a game that can make you doubt your rightful position in the universe with a spiffing hat. It's

## NEED TO KNOW

**WHAT IS IT?**  
A bout of crippling hangxiety that's somehow been fashioned into a masterpiece

**EXPECT TO PAY**  
£35

**DEVELOPER**  
ZA/UM

**PUBLISHER**  
In-house

**REVIEWED ON**  
Intel Core i7-7700 CUP  
@ 3.60GHz, 16 GB RAM,  
NVIDIA GeForce GTX  
1070, Windows 10

**MULTIPLAYER**

No

**LINK**  
[discoelysium.com](http://discoelysium.com)

amazing that, even after all the complicated internalisation, that there's any resource left to build a relatable environment.

## AMBROSIOUS OF THE GODS

Revachol, however, is a real place full of richly-drawn people, thickened with the scar tissue of violence, revolution and corruption, like taking a holiday in a conflicting ideology. Despite being mostly repellent, it has a specific and special undertow that will keep you coming back, even if it's like watching a painful video of last night's karaoke. And the central relationship between your clown car of a detective and the neat efficiency of Kim Kitsuragi is a story in itself.

The result is something embarrassingly good: a game where the world, characters, or pin-sharp deflation of the player's ego would all have been enough on their own. Taken together, they're astonishing. ■

## PC GAMER VERDICT

The greatest game to ever make you deeply question your worth as a functioning member of society.

93



BELOW: In some states it's illegal to let squirrels fish. But not this one.



#### NEED TO KNOW

EXPECT TO PAY  
£25

DEVELOPER  
Traveller's Tales

PUBLISHER  
TT Games

## BRICK ROLLED

**LEGO CITY UNDERCOVER** is Wii-ly good

**L**ego City Undercover feels like an anomaly. It only came out in 2013, but that feels like a lifetime ago. A modern version of the game would crowdbar in Hollywood talent to voice Chase McCain, the wisecracking celebrity cop who feels like a warning from the past about the rise of Chris Pratt.

More telling, however, is the fact your in-game interface is based on the Wii U, something that feels slightly tragic and amusing at the same time: the controller equivalent of drinking mercury to cure syphilis. And although it often feels like you're being forced to solve crimes with a dead man's Etch A Sketch, it rarely detracts from this smart, often surprising open world experience.

The inherent Nintendosity extends to the way it bombards you

with ideas. It might have been enough to drive around a fully realised Lego world, smashing things up and rebuilding them, but the game throws in grapple guns, disguises, and gambolling traversal. It's also funny, in a way that feels like it has some substance beyond the winks and quips. Handing tutorial work to your idiot sidekick Frank Honey is a bright way of imparting crucial info, and there's a disarming amount of UK comedy talent here, too: Adam Buxton and Peter Serefinowicz both turn up to play bit parts.

It doesn't always work – sometimes it feels like you're pulled into endless expositional cutscenes, but that's because there's a story here: another thing that sets this apart from other TT games that bring that honed brand of irreverent humour to established properties. ■

81



### ART OF MURDER: FBI CONFIDENTIAL

**A**rt of Murder is one of those lesser-known point-and-click franchises that's lost enough momentum over time to eventually become a hidden object game. It's mostly busywork, diminished by messy puzzles, vague clues, and dialogue that makes most text-to-speech programs sound like Gary Oldman in an Oscar-winning turn. Protagonist Nicole Bonnet isn't inspiring, either: more like a sentient pantsuit trying to fool people into thinking it's alive. The lowest point comes when a kidnapped Nicole has to scoot a chair around a noisy room without being heard; a puzzle so atrocious I decide it's best to leave her there forever. ■

64



### PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY TRILOGY

**M**ost of the games this month are on the business end of law enforcement, so it's nice to mix things up, even if most of your time with Phoenix Wright is spent exonerating innocent people rather than catching guilty ones. There's a strange compulsion with Ace Attorney games, almost like a romcom with court procedure. Most of the time, you know exactly what's going to happen and when, but it doesn't matter. You just live for the moments when the music swells, a man in a magnificent blue suit points dramatically, and everything falls into place in a deeply satisfying way. Nobody needs to know it was all guesswork. ■

80



### VIRGINIA

**I**f games were established and self-referential enough to have their own version of SNL, Virginia might feel like a parody. It's hand-crafted from all the things that make Steam reviewers testy: it's short, story heavy and contains more than one woman. But even if the lack of dialogue occasionally makes Virginia feel like a two-hour cold open, there's enough atmosphere here to make it worth investigating, especially if your idea of a good time is sitting in a diner contemplating life's unspoken complexities. ■

64



GOEMON CITY



REPUBLIC OF GAMERS

# ROG CITADEL XV

## SCAR RUNNER



Introducing SCAR Runner, an all-new expansion of ROG's Citadel XV first-person parkour game. Download for free on Steam® and experience a unique blend of high-octane gameplay and real-world puzzle solving. Race against time, solve the mystery and recover critical information which might just save the world. Play with the incredible new ROG Strix SCAR 17 SE Gaming Laptop powered by the state-of-the-art Intel Core™ i9-12950HX, designed to run as fast as you and merge real and virtual worlds, using the hardware itself to reveal hidden clues to boost your in-game progress. Take your game and run with it.



Download



Gaming  
Happens  
with Intel



# HARDWARE

GET THE PC YOUR GAMES DESERVE



**94**

## GROUP TEST

Our review of the very best power supplies for PC gaming.

**98**

## TECH REPORT

What should happen to our old hardware when we're done with it?

**100**

## TECH TALES

Trying to create the perfect portable gaming PC.

**102**

## BUYER'S GUIDE

Three expert builds to help you find the right hardware for you.





## GROUP TEST

# POWER SUPPLIES

Watt's the best power supply for PC gaming? We've got you covered.

*By Jacob Ridley*

**T**he best power supplies are so much more than a dull power brick. They're highly efficient electrical components, many able to deliver power in excess of 1,000W with little variance in voltage. That's the lifeblood of your PC, and if you think of all the drives and processors that require a steady stream of power, your PSU has its work cut out for it.

Being such an important component, we tend to look past the bargain basement PSUs. It's very rare that one has been built to a high standard as we need it to be. That's not to say we haven't considered some budget options, they just might cost you a small amount more than another seemingly competitive unit. You get what you pay for, however, and when it comes to your PSU a bit more cash can make for a much more reliable unit.





2



# AX1600i

CORSAIR £480

## The PSU of choice for enthusiast gamers

**1** The AX1600i is the worthy successor of the legendary AX1500i. Both units are made by Flextronics, using cutting-edge technology, while offering the best performance that money can buy today.

The Corsair AX1600i is the first desktop PSU to use totem-pole PFC converter technology, which even several years after its release very few PSUs utilise. In short, the AX1600i can offer up to 99% efficiency, compared to the 96% efficiency levels that the most advanced conventional APFC

converters can deliver. Besides being highly efficient, the AX1600i offers outstanding load regulation, excellent transient response, long hold-up time, and excellent ripple suppression. It also retains quiet operation, thanks to the relaxed fan profile.

You will pay a lot to get your hands on a Corsair AX1600i, but there is nothing else able to meet this PSU eye-to-eye when it comes to overall performance.

### PC GAMER VERDICT

- Top performance in all areas
- High build quality
- Silent operation

**SPECS** MANUFACTURER (OEM): FLEXTRONICS / **MAX. DC OUTPUT:** 1600W / **EFFICIENCY:** 80 PLUS TITANIUM, CYBENETICS TITANIUM / **NOISE:** CYBENETICS A (20-25 DB[A]) / **COOLING:** 140MM FLUID DYNAMIC BEARING FAN / **MODULARITY:** YES (FULLY) / **WARRANTY:** 10 YEARS

# RM750X (2021)

CORSAIR £110

## The best mid-capacity PSU

**2** The newest version of the Corsair RM750x unit, introduced in 2021, managed to improve an already outstanding product. Corsair's RMx line is among the best in the PSU market, combining high performance and reasonable prices, and the RM750x is clear proof of this. The competition is tough, but Corsair's R&D manager, Jon Gerow, and his team of engineers manage to create products that set the bar higher and higher.

The build quality is amazing in this CWT platform, which is only available to Corsair. The caps on

both primary and secondary sides are Japanese and the FETs, along with the magnetic levitation fan, won't have a problem outliving the ten-year warranty.

The fan upgrade is a highly welcome feature, too. It boosts reliability, even under harsh conditions where most other fans would have issues in the long run. The cooling fan is the crucial part of every PSU, so it is important to use the best fan possible.

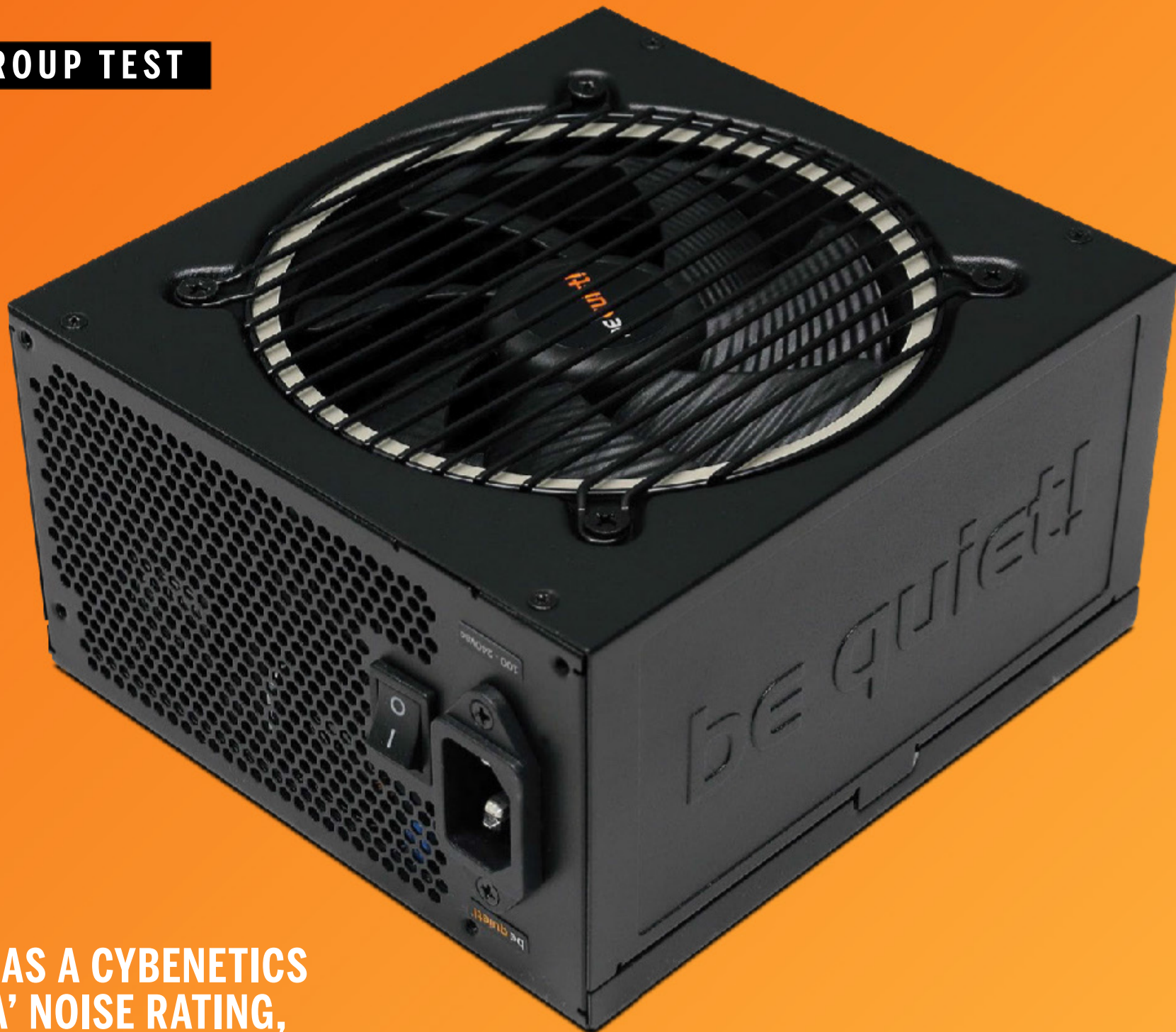
### PC GAMER VERDICT

- Magnetic Bearing Fan
- High build quality
- Ten-year warranty

**SPECS** MANUFACTURER (OEM): CHANNEL WELL TECHNOLOGY / **MAX. DC OUTPUT:** 750W / **EFFICIENCY:** 80 PLUS GOLD, CYBENETICS GOLD / **NOISE:** CYBENETICS A- (25-30 DB[A]) / **COOLING:** 140MM MAGNETIC LEVITATION FAN / **MODULARITY:** YES (FULLY) / **WARRANTY:** 10 YEARS



## GROUP TEST



HAS A CYBENETICS  
'A' NOISE RATING,  
PROVING IT IS QUIET

3

### Pure Power 11 FM 550W

BE QUIET! £70

#### The best low-capacity PSU

**3** Be quiet! has developed a unique platform alongside OEM partner Channel Well Technology for its Pure Power 11 FM line, and the results are fantastic. The Pure Power 11 FM with 550W capacity is our top choice for this wattage category, and it is ideal for not demanding systems where users require a quality PSU under \$100.

The PSU is 80 PLUS Gold and Cybenetics Gold certified in efficiency and has a Cybenetics 'A' noise rating, proving it is quiet. The dimensions are standard, with 160mm depth, and the cooling fan uses a rifle bearing for

increased reliability. The five-year warranty is half than what the competition provides. Still, you cannot call it short.

The Pure Power 11 FM 550 showed in testing that it has no problem facing intense competition from Corsair, Seasonic, EVGA, Cooler Master and others. Perhaps its best competition is the Seasonic Focus Plus Platinum 550W, but this is still the outright winner.

#### PC GAMER VERDICT

- High performance
- Silent operation
- Only a five-year warranty

**SPECS** MANUFACTURER (OEM): CHANNEL WELL TECHNOLOGY / **MAX. DC OUTPUT:** 550W / **EFFICIENCY:** 80 PLUS GOLD, CYBENETICS GOLD / **NOISE:** CYBENETICS A (20-25 DB[A]) / **COOLING:** 120MM RIFLE BEARING FAN / **MODULARITY:** YES (FULLY) / **WARRANTY:** 5 YEARS

### Pylon 450

XPG £65

#### A trustworthy budget PSU

**4** This XPG is our favourite for such low wattage nowadays, covering just the bare essentials in terms of PC performance, as Corsair decided to withdraw the popular CX450 model. That used a modern but expensive platform, making it hard to keep its price low. From the moment the CX450 is out of the equation, the road is open for the Pylon 450 to shine.

From 2022, XPG upgraded the warranty on all Pylon models to five years to keep up with the competition. Given the fluid dynamic bearing fan and the reliable platform, the warranty

upgrade makes sense. The compromise that had to be made to keep the cost down was the use of an outdated platform.

The non-modular cable design won't please most users, but modular cables would notably affect the final price, so they had to go to. Given the not-so-high number of cables in this PSU, the non-modular design isn't the worst. Thankfully, the five-year warranty is the cherry on top.

#### PC GAMER VERDICT

- Fluid dynamic bearing fan
- Five-year warranty
- Non-modular

**SPECS** MANUFACTURER (OEM): CHANNEL WELL TECHNOLOGY / **MAX. DC OUTPUT:** 450W / **EFFICIENCY:** 80 PLUS BRONZE, CYBENETICS BRONZE / **NOISE:** CYBENETICS A-RATING (25-30DB[A]) / **COOLING:** 120MM FLUID DYNAMIC BEARING FAN / **MODULARITY:** NO / **WARRANTY:** 5 YEARS

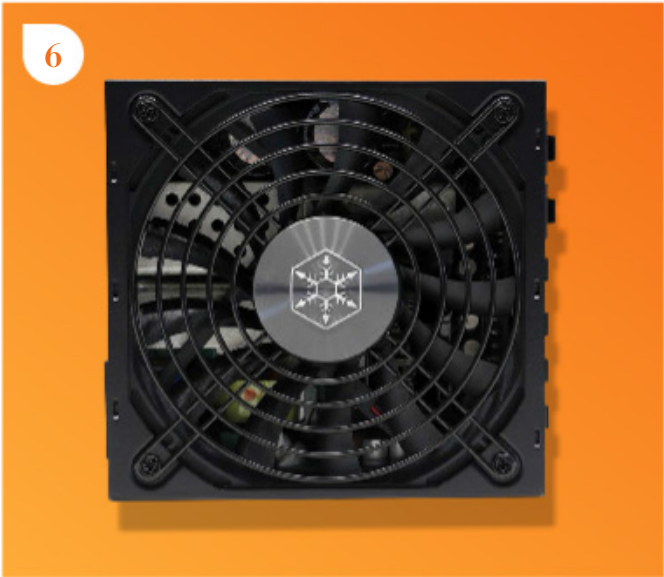




HOW WE TEST

Each PSU that we recommend has been tested rigorously by our friends and PSU experts over at Cybenetics, to ensure it's up to the standard we're after. A tremendous amount of testing goes into each PSU review, including the use of oscilloscopes, power analysers, infrared cameras and load testing devices. Since these are tests specifically designed for gaming PC power supplies, we're also double checking these PSUs run cool and quiet.

You might see a whole lot more of Cybenetics' own efficiency and noise certifications in coming years, as both have been officially acknowledged in the latest PSU standard published by Intel. If you want more information on the PSUs outlined in this issue, head to [pcgamer.com](http://pcgamer.com) to check out a full review for each model.



TX-1000

SEASONIC £260

The best 1000W PSU right now

**5** The Seasonic TX-1000 has top-notch build quality. Besides great soldering work, it also uses Japanese caps everywhere, including many polymer caps besides electrolytic ones and a fluid dynamic bearing fan. Seasonic engineers did their best to offer sky-high efficiency under all load regions and silent operation, at the same time, along with increased reliability.

Performance-wise, this PSU belongs to the top league since it achieves tight load regulation on all rails, it has terrific ripple suppression without using the annoying in-line caps, and its hold-up time is sky-high. On top of that, the 5VSB rail's efficiency is high, and at light loads, the PSU achieves some of the highest efficiency readings we have seen.

Seasonic's Prime platform still holds the performance crown years after its development. Plus, when a manufacturer is confident enough to provide a platform with a 12-year warranty, you know that this is a bullet-proof product.

PC GAMER

VERDICT

- High performance
- High-quality components
- 12-year warranty

**SPECS** MANUFACTURER (OEM): SEASONIC / **MAX. DC OUTPUT:** 1000W / **EFFICIENCY:** 80 PLUS TITANIUM, CYBENETICS TITANIUM / **NOISE:** CYBENETICS A+ (15-20 DB[A]) / **COOLING:** 135MM FLUID DYNAMIC BEARING FAN / **MODULARITY:** YES (FULLY) / **WARRANTY:** 12 YEARS

SX1000

SILVERSTONE £195

Incredible power in a tiny package

**6** The SilverStone SX1000 is the strongest small factor unit we have tested so far, and it has enough connectors to support a strong gaming system even in a tight space. It even appears way stronger than its specs list appears, since we pushed it close to 1500W without issue.

SilverStone has equipped this PSU with two EPS and six PCIe connectors to ensure it can deliver its full power without any problems. Moreover, all cables are modular, making the PSU's installation a breeze. Because of the small PCB, the temperatures at the internals can go high, so a double ball-bearing fan is used, which can handle hot conditions without any problems.

Since everything small and powerful is usually expensive, especially in the IT world, the SX1000 will empty your wallet. That said, PSUs are inexpensive given the vital role that they have in every system, so a 250-300 dollar power supply doesn't look that expensive.

PC GAMER

VERDICT

- Extremely high power-density
- High build quality
- Efficient

**SPECS** MANUFACTURER (OEM): ENHANCE ELECTRONICS / **MAX. DC OUTPUT:** 1000W / **EFFICIENCY:** 80 PLUS PLATINUM, CYBENETICS PLATINUM / **NOISE:** CYBENETICS STANDARD+ (35-40 DB[A]) / **COOLING:** 120MM DOUBLE BALL BEARING FAN / **MODULARITY:** YES (FULLY) / **WARRANTY:** 5 YEARS



Pictured: writer's home, 2052. Now then, who needs a SCART lead, eh?

# BEIGE GOLD

Where does all our **OLD HARDWARE** end up?

**H**ow many PCs have you owned, and where are they now? It's not something we give much thought to in the landscape of constant iteration and abrupt obsolescence that is PC gaming, but perhaps we actually should. Because the answer is probably: a lot.

At this very moment there are four PCs in my gaming room. There's the gaming PC I play modern titles on, and which sees daily use. And then there's the stack of musty beige boxes that indicate something more akin to a hoarding problem than a fun pastime.

A 1998 Packard Bell, meticulously rebuilt to the exact specs of my first ever home computer, plus accompanying CRT monitor in preposterously large cardboard box. An XP-era system I built myself in about 2001, which hasn't been turned on since the Tony Blair administration. And another XP device, from Advent, in tasteful silver with 2003's finest componentry inside and a flat panel monitor in, again, an absurdly big box.

This is the hoarder's solution to the problem of PC hardware churn. Whereas most people might recycle old machines, try to sell them on, or send them to a landfill, some of us prefer to curate small, privately owned museums of obsolete gaming PCs. But it's not an arbitrary choice

— whatever we decide has an impact on the economy, the environment, and on culture.

## MERCURY RISING

About three quarters of all PCs ever produced are now considered surplus hardware and aren't currently in use. Some of them have been recycled — about 15% of electronics equipment in the United States today goes that route. Back in 2009, 38% of all PCs were recycled.

The majority ends up either in landfill or incinerated, and both of those outcomes are pretty disastrous. PCs, as we all know, are mainly built using a complex system of lolly sticks and elastic bands, but they do also contain harmful substances like lead. Pro tip: it's never a good idea to light something containing lead on fire. Leaded petrol killed about 1.2 million people each year since it was first introduced to combustion engines so it's bad news for us all when a PC ends up in the furnace.

Festering in landfill isn't much better, though. The lead from inside PC componentry, along with other harmful materials like mercury and cadmium, can absorb into the soil and local water around landfill sites.

The Basel Convention, effective since 1992, binds all nations who signed it to strict protocols for the handling and disposal of environmentally harmful materials within electronics equipment, but that's had the unexpected and



## Look who's stalking

A word of warning to anyone about to ditch an old PC: wipe the hard drives really thoroughly beforehand. Data breaches from recycled PCs are alarmingly common, and sensitive documents from the USA's defensive intelligence agency and Homeland Security have been found and 'recycled' in Ghana's vast Agbogbloshie electronic waste dump.





**FAR LEFT:** It was your pride and joy once. It deserves a better home than the ignominy of this pile.

**LEFT:** Heavy, bulky, impractical to use with modern machines. Totally worth it.

**OLDEN WONDERS** *Four eras in PC gaming you should own a machine from*



**WIN95 WONDER**  
The unassuming, straightforward lines. The ability to play games like *Doom*, *Civ II* and *Carmageddon* natively.



**WIN98 WARRIOR**  
The definitive way to play *Half-Life*, *Deus Ex*, *Thief*, *System Shock 2*, *Baldur's Gate II* and the like.



**XP EXCALIBUR**  
You need it for those early '00s titles that need more oomph than a Win98 system provides. *Far Cry*, *Doom 3* and *Fable*.



**VISTA VOYAGER**  
There is already a gap in support for games built for DirectX 10 and Games For Windows Live. This is the solution to it.

unfortunate side effect of a roaring trade from developed nations bound by the agreement to less developed third world nations who aren't. In essence, the guidelines mean that although people might not be chucking CRT monitors into a big chimney in your neighbourhood, they're doing it in another part of the world instead.

Some recycling plants in these less developed countries use acid baths to strip wires and resell circuit boards, or smash old components and release their toxins onto the ground. It's not a perfect system, then.

**SCRAPHEAP CHALLENGE**

Better in both theory and practice is consumer reselling, whereby your once treasured monster gaming PC that has now become utterly irrelevant to you is sold to someone without quite such a debilitating ray tracing addiction. The exchange of goods prompts a (modest) stimulation of the economy, no hazardous materials are spilled all over the floor, and in a less hard-headed sense, someone else out there continues to glean enjoyment from machinery that for you is just a massive paperweight.

The charity sector also steps in pretty effectively here, taking your old beige boxes and often even refurbishing them before passing them on to individuals and organisations in need of them. Computers4charity.org, the Turing Trust and The Restart Project are all great options if you're getting rid of a PC in the UK.

But what about the third option, the one that eats up a large corner of your house, draws the ire of partners and forces you into ever-more convoluted rhetoric about why it's a

**FESTERING IN  
LANDFILL ISN'T  
MUCH BETTER,  
THOUGH**

good thing you still own a Pentium III Gateway PC? Arguably this is the noblest route of all. By accepting that a PC is for life, not just for the latest *Metro* title, we're preserving little pieces of tech history whose other examples are being burned and dumped in massive quantities. We're not just lessening the environmental impact of PC gaming's 'go and buy this incrementally better piece of PCB' culture, we're preserving the culture itself. Playing old games on emulators can't compare to pressing a beige 'on' button and being greeted by Windows 98, and in 20 years when those machines are incredibly rare and valuable, maybe you'll wish you gave up some floorspace for one back in the 2010s too. ■

*Phil Iwaniuk*



**LEFT:** E-waste is already having a detrimental effect on Ghana's air quality.



# CASE STUDY

Is a **PORTABLE TOP-SPEC GAMING PC** even possible?

**U**sually there are just two key parameters governing our purchase journey when the time comes to build or upgrade a computer. One: how much money is in our current account right now, and two: how much of that money can we spend on RGB circuit boards before we lose the ability to meet our own gaze in the mirror without feeling utter shame?

And that's it. We look for the parts with the highest specs available at the prices we can afford, put them all together in a big box and sit back in our chairs, laughing at all the puny games who think they can get even a momentary frame drop out of us now.

That same process grows exponentially in sleepless night-inducing deliberation and fiddliness if we add just one more variable, though. What if we get it into our head that we want an all-AMD system, what then? Or, heaven forbid, some high concept project like a system submerged in mineral oil?

Such a dilemma hit this writer in 2019 while working in an office about 250 miles from home during the week and returning to the leafy meditation of rural Yorkshire at the weekend. What was I supposed to do, *not* have a gaming PC with me at all times? Unthinkable. No, instead I needed to find a way to pack an RTX 2080 Ti build into something that could fit into a suitcase.

## MICRO MACHINE

That means, above all, a really small case. Small, and also with incredible thermal venting to disperse all the heat that my 2080 TI, i7 9700K, and RAM modules were puffing out while piled basically on top of each other. Some said it couldn't be done. Others said it just wasn't a very good idea. But I didn't take 'wasn't a very good idea' for an answer.

Constraints often breed creativity, and fortunately I had two key sets of dimensions that significantly narrowed my search criteria: the size of my suitcase, and the GPU clearance needed to get my graphics card into the case.

That put a Silverstone micro ATX case front and centre. It was arranged horizontally, like a giant old top-loading VHS player. I liked that aspect about it. It could also, in theory, house my current motherboard, coolers and GPU while leaving enough suitcase space for a good wedge of shirts and rolled up T-shirts.

It didn't work. Or rather, it functioned perfectly well as a home for 90% of my components, but offered nothing like the clearance needed to mount the double-radiator attached to my liquid CPU cooler. So I could either buy a new cooler, with a lower profile radiator and just one fan, lessening the airflow potential within an already tight space, or I could find another new home for the existing gubbins.

Please welcome to the stage, Corsair's Carbide 275Q. A totally unassuming case, and not particularly small either.

But, as it turns out, just small enough to be zipped up inside my suitcase and big enough to mount a twin-fan cooler within. An absolute result.

This being a 'quiet' case, there were also no glass panels to worry about in transit. This was, as it turned out when I put the project into practice on CrossCountry's finest locomotives, absolutely vital. It wasn't a perfect system, but it proved an ample road warrior to accompany me up and down the country for several months without hardware mishaps or any obvious overheating.

## CONSTRAINTS OFTEN BREED CREATIVITY

## SUPERSIZE ME

Once you've gone through that trial and error process, what you realise is that most of the space in your standard gaming PC is a bit redundant, and that building a really effective mini-PC needs to start from the ground up. It's always going to be difficult to retrofit your existing componentry into a smaller

space. Buying all the parts at once means you can really consider how they all fit together.

A small form factor PSU, for example, can have a huge bearing on the clearance for other parts in your rig. Picking something with not just smaller dimensions but a modular cable system means you're not losing any unnecessary space or airflow to useless dangling wires. And that might mean your CPU cooler fits inside the case you want now, whereas it wouldn't have with a standard PSU.

Expensive though it is, going fully M.2 with your storage is also a massive advantage here. Obviously the drive itself's smaller than an SSD or HDD, but it also carries the benefits of ditching the SATA and power connectors. Re-tool your shopping list with these principles in mind, and you might find yourself gaming on an uncompromising system that just happens to fit in a suitcase at a moment's notice. ■

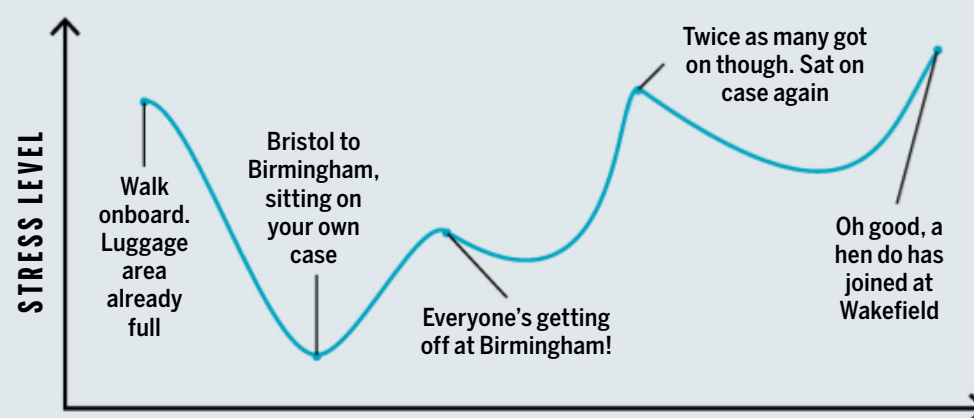
*Phil Iwaniuk*



**PHIL IWANIUK**  
Prides himself on using Arctic Silver 5 as shaving foam and archives his coiffured hair using an NZXT Kraken Z-3.

## NATIONAL DEPRESSED

*Your psyche during a train ride with a PC in tow*







**ABOVE:** Taking the M.2 route with storage saves not just case space but cables, too.

**BELOW:** Certainly not the smallest, but Corsair's Carbide 275Q can, in fact, fit in a suitcase.



**ABOVE:** What we all imagine happens when a performance CPU's placed anywhere but a full tower.

**BELOW:** Travel light: wallet, passport, 3080 TI liquid cooled gaming PC. Just the essentials.





YOUR NEXT PC

# BUYER'S GUIDE

Build the best PC for your budget



## KEY

### *Budget build*

PC gaming is for everyone. Pick the parts you want to build a new, well-rounded PC for a good price.

### *Mid-range build*

You want to run every new game at 1080p 60fps. This recommended build will see you through.

### *Advanced build*

You're looking for the best PC on the market and superior components. But you still want to spend smart.



# BUDGET BUILD

Enjoy 1080p gaming without breaking the bank



TOTAL  
£948

|               |                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MOTHERBOARD   |    | <b>B660M Pro RS</b><br>ASRock <b>£115</b><br>This is as cheap as we want to go while still offering room for expansion and upgrades down the line.                       |
| PROCESSOR     |    | <b>Core i5 12400F</b><br>Intel <b>£170</b><br>There's no iGPU on this chip but it's a little cheaper as a result, and will work great for this particular build.         |
| GRAPHICS CARD |    | <b>GeForce RTX 3050</b><br>Nvidia <b>£239</b><br>This GPU will deliver 1080p performance easily, and with 8GB of memory it's built to last.                              |
| COOLER        |   | <b>Laminar RM1 (included with CPU)</b><br>Intel <b>£0</b><br>There's room for an upgrade here, but on a budget the included CPU will work just fine.                     |
| MEMORY        |  | <b>Vengeance LPX 8GB (2x 4GB) DDR4-2400</b><br>Corsair <b>£39</b><br>You could bump this to 16GB, but to save as much as possible we'll stick to 8GB.                    |
| POWER SUPPLY  |  | <b>CV Series 550W</b><br>Corsair <b>£39</b><br>You could likely make do with less wattage, but Nvidia recommends a 550W PSU for the RTX 3050, so let's be safe.          |
| SSD           |  | <b>MX500 500GB</b><br>Crucial <b>£57</b><br>One of the best value SATA SSDs you can buy and plenty fast enough for a snappy OS.                                          |
| HDD           |  | <b>WD Blue 1TB 7200rpm</b><br>Western Digital <b>£37</b><br>You don't need a HDD, so feel free to cut this to save cash, but one sure helps if you're a virtual hoarder. |
| CASE          |  | <b>Zauron</b><br>Aerocool <b>£32</b><br>This Aerocool will let your components breathe and has space for further expansion and cooling.                                  |
| DISPLAY       |  | <b>GW2280</b><br>BenQ <b>£105</b><br>A 1080p60 VA monitor will see you through in style and, once you upgrade, will make a superb second monitor.                        |
| KEYBOARD      |  | <b>G213</b><br>Logitech <b>£40</b><br>It may be a membrane switch board, but it's stylish, and well-built. Sometimes that's worth more than cheap clicky switches.       |
| MOUSE         |  | <b>G102</b><br>Logitech <b>£35</b><br>A classic shape delivered in a sleek shell, this mouse fits all hand sizes and grips. A solid option for the money.                |
| HEADSET       |  | <b>HS35</b><br>Corsair <b>£40</b><br>This headset delivers in-game with its punchy drivers and clear microphone – perfect for video calls and multiplayer alike.         |

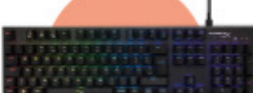


# MID-RANGE BUILD

Our recommended build for playing the latest games



**TOTAL**  
**£1,665**

|               |                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MOTHERBOARD   |    | <b>B660M Mortar WiFi</b><br>MSI <b>£180</b><br>This MSI board delivers everything we need in a compact package and allows us to use much cheaper DDR4 memory.                                     |
| PROCESSOR     |    | <b>Core i5 12400</b><br>Intel <b>£170</b><br>Intel's 11th Gen was at its best on a budget, and that's why this six-core/12-thread processor is a great fit for this build.                        |
| GRAPHICS CARD |    | <b>GeForce RTX 3060 Ti Founders Ed.</b><br>Nvidia <b>£369</b><br>The RTX 3060 Ti is a little overkill but we're willing to make sacrifices elsewhere to make it work.                             |
| COOLER        |   | <b>Laminar RM1 (included with CPU)</b><br>Intel <b>£30</b><br>Intel bundles a redesigned CPU cooler with some 12th Gen processors. This little chip chiller will serve us well for a while.       |
| MEMORY        |  | <b>Ballistix 16GB DDR4 (2x8GB)</b><br>Crucial <b>£75</b><br>With plenty of capacity at 16GB, this unembellished memory has everything you need for gaming and more.                               |
| POWER SUPPLY  |  | <b>CX650M</b><br>Corsair <b>£93</b><br>The heart of your gaming PC is your PSU, and this 650W Corsair promises to keep your rig ticking nicely.                                                   |
| SSD           |  | <b>A80 1TB</b><br>Silicon Power <b>£98</b><br>Silicon Power has delivered a high capacity, affordable SSD and has comes with some serious storage speed.                                          |
| HDD           |  | <b>WD Blue 1TB 7200rpm</b><br>Western Digital <b>£37</b><br>Just like in the budget build, this HDD isn't strictly necessary, but for a pretty low price it's nice to have plenty of extra space. |
| CASE          |  | <b>H7</b><br>NZXT <b>£120</b><br>It's very clever of NZXT to design such an easy PC case to build into, and make it look so gorgeous too.                                                         |
| DISPLAY       |  | <b>S2722DGM</b><br>Dell <b>£260</b><br>With a snappy 165Hz refresh rate and a 1440p resolution, this Dell is an enviable blend of monitor performance.                                            |
| KEYBOARD      |  | <b>Alloy FPS</b><br>HyperX <b>£80</b><br>As the name suggests, this keyboard is built like an absolute tank, with a steel frame and Cherry MX switches.                                           |
| MOUSE         |  | <b>Model O-</b><br>Glorious <b>£59</b><br>Lightweight and responsive, the Model O- has made a name for itself among streamers and pros thanks to its clever design.                               |
| HEADSET       |  | <b>Blackshark V2</b><br>Razer <b>£94</b><br>The Blackshark V2 offers up some killer audio quality to rival the greats. And at a reasonable price too.                                             |

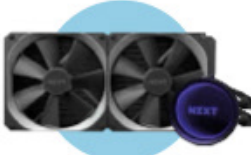


# ADVANCED BUILD

Go above and beyond with a PC powerful enough to end worlds



TOTAL  
£4,971

|               |                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MOTHERBOARD   |    | <b>MPG Z690 Carbon WiFi</b><br>MSI <b>£410</b><br>This MSI motherboard offers a mix of high-end features, plentiful ports, and DDR5 support, without an extreme price tag.        |
| PROCESSOR     |    | <b>Core i9 12900K</b><br>Intel <b>£599</b><br>Intel's Core i9 12900K represents Alder Lake's finest chip, and it's one hell of a processor for whatever you might throw at it.    |
| GRAPHICS CARD |    | <b>GeForce RTX 3080 Ti Founders Ed.</b><br>Nvidia <b>£1,199</b><br>The RTX 3080 Ti is the latest flagship graphics card from Nvidia, but savvy builders may prefer the RTX 3080.  |
| COOLER        |   | <b>Kraken X63</b><br>NZXT <b>£123</b><br>One of the most stunning AIO coolers rebuilt with an updated pump, LGA 1700 bracket, and RGB lighting for more pizzazz.                  |
| MEMORY        |  | <b>Trident Z5 RGB</b><br>G.Skill <b>£421</b><br>This is a new memory standard for a new era of memory speed. DDR5 is blisteringly and fantastically quick.                        |
| POWER SUPPLY  |  | <b>SuperNOVA 1000 G5 Gold</b><br>EVGA <b>£200</b><br>This calibre of gaming PC draws a lot of power. Thankfully, this PSU can handle it with high efficiency.                     |
| SSD           |  | <b>WD Black SN850 1TB</b><br>Western Digital <b>£120</b><br>Though technically this platform support PCIe 5.0, for now we're sticking with WD's PCIe 4.0 speeds with the SN850.   |
| HDD           |  | <b>860 QVO 2TB</b><br>Samsung <b>£195</b><br>Built on QLC flash memory, it's not the quickest storage around, but it's a speedy alternative to an HDD.                            |
| CASE          |  | <b>5000D</b><br>Corsair <b>£155</b><br>We swear this stylish mid-tower is bigger on the inside. It's the PC equivalent of the TARDIS.                                             |
| DISPLAY       |  | <b>34 QD-OLED (AW3423DW)</b><br>Alienware <b>£1,099</b><br>You could be much more sensible on your screen than this. For this build, however, we only want the best.              |
| KEYBOARD      |  | <b>G915 Lightspeed</b><br>Logitech <b>£210</b><br>Low-profile mechanical switches are just the icing on the cake that is the superb, wireless Logitech G915.                      |
| MOUSE         |  | <b>G502 Lightspeed</b><br>Logitech <b>£110</b><br>With a lengthy battery life and a phenomenal sensor to keep you gaming at your best, the G502 is undoubtedly one of the finest. |
| HEADSET       |  | <b>Arctis 7 Wireless</b><br>SteelSeries <b>£130</b><br>If you've settled on a wireless keyboard and mouse, the last thing you want is a pesky cable to your headset.              |



# EXTRA+LIFE

CONTINUED ADVENTURES IN GAMING



## “Fall Guys has made me a same sized fish in a much bigger pond”

Years in, I’ve finally brought home my own crown in **FALL GUYS**

**S**tuck in the interlude of a teen comedy, two seconds before poor decisions are made, are my friends and I – sitting on the digital stoop that is our group Discord chat – saying once again, “What do you wanna play today?” The answer this month, catalyst for ten thousand “No! Come ON”s was *Fall Guys*.

Now that Mediatonic’s meme-able stumble chums are free-to-play, we went back to test the waters of the game we’d mainlined for about two months after its original launch. After several seasons of new maps, *Fall Guys* was way less tiring than when we first sunk dozens of hours into it.

The jungle-themed rounds with their awful lily pads remain my own personal torture. I’m bad at platforming, worse at judging

### LAUREN MORTON



**THIS MONTH**  
Defeated the free-to-play masses.

**ALSO PLAYED**  
*Core Keeper, Phasmophobia*

distances in the air, and rarely manage to qualify for the next round. The recently added races with *Sonic*-like speed gates though? Perfection. It’s not like I win them all the time, but going fast and finding the right line through a race is so much more satisfying than taking a rhino horn to the rear.

The most important order of business for me this month, aside from unlocking as many outfits as possible, was finally winning a show in my own right. Even after spending weeks in 2020 perfecting my Fall

**TOP:** It’s a death defying life I lead, I take my chances.

Mountain race technique or attempting not to get clobbered in Jump Showdown, I’d never brought home the crown. Lucky for me, free-to-fail *Fall Guys* and cross-play support has made me a same sized fish in a much bigger pond.

### NEWBIE TRAP

It became clear that the kiddos had arrived when we queued up as a group of three for a squads show – the new format with a combined group score instead of qualifying individually – and were assigned a fourth who stumbled and struggled through every obstacle course. How

## THE RECENTLY ADDED RACES WITH SONIC-LIKE SPEED GATES THOUGH? PERFECTION



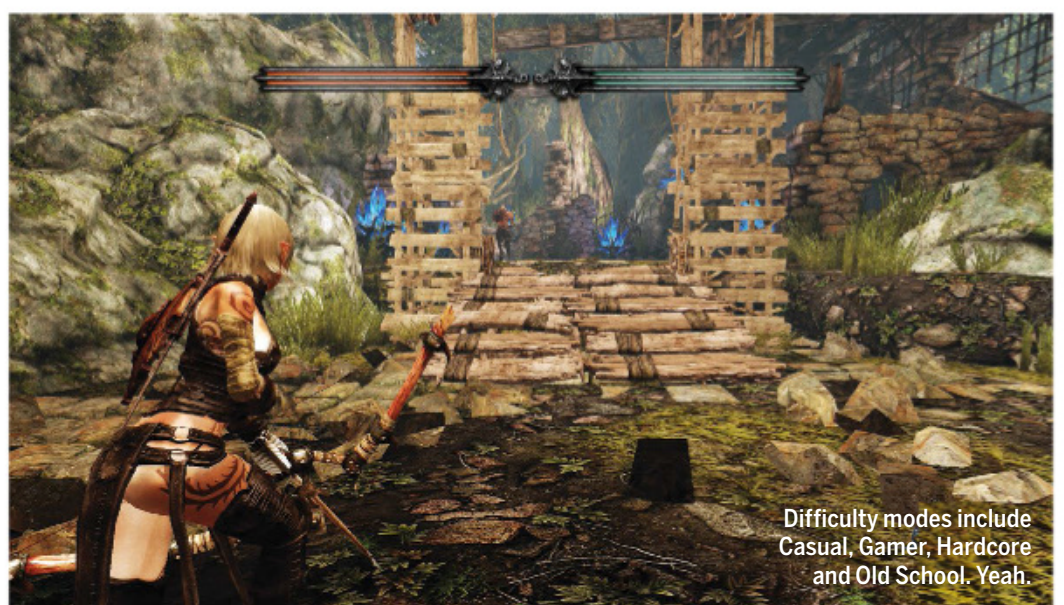


could you be mad at one of those bright-coloured little beans though?

We carried our new pal as far as we could, cheering them on with, “You can do it buddy,” in our group voice call that they couldn’t hear. Never have I ever had a better motivation for beating the competition than carrying a teammate through to the next round.

Nothing, that is, except chasing my own glory. After we ducked out of squad games and back into the solo games, fate would have it that I finally won out on the Hex-A-Gone round, hopping with sweaty hands on my controller from one hex to another, not even looking at the number of players remaining, until shouts from my friends confirmed that I’d finally freaking done it. It’s me. I am the Fall Guy at last. After finally nabbing my first win, I realised that I’d changed my victory celebration from the default. I’d never expected to ever see it, you know?

Free-to-play has of course morphed *Fall Guys* into a mess of extra currencies, achievements and progression tracks that make my head hurt. But it’s worth getting back in for the reinvigorated player counts, even if just to lord your win over a crowd of likely children. ■



Difficulty modes include Casual, Gamer, Hardcore and Old School. Yeah.

## “A muddy, horny, trend-chasing mess”

To the dark ages in **HUNTED: THE DEMON’S FORGE**

▶ ROBIN VALENTINE



**THIS MONTH**  
Finally justified buying this game in a sale five years ago.

**ALSO PLAYED**  
*Crusader Kings III*, *MultiVersus*

**T**here’s a sad desperation that emanates from *Hunted: The Demon’s Forge*. Published by Bethesda and developed by InXile, it should by rights be a great fantasy RPG – but released at a time of real insecurity in the genre, it’s instead a muddy, horny, trend-chasing mess.

Released in 2011, it’s caught between playing to the developer’s strengths as RPG veterans, and pressure to appeal to a broader audience at a time when *Gears of War* was still king. It’s a muddled mix of fantasy worldbuilding and macho nonsense.

The two playable characters are a musclebound meathead, and a female elf wearing an outfit that amounts to about four thin belts. Exposed as she already is at all times, the camera still feels like it’s trying to film right up the back of her meagre skirt whenever you do anything saucy, like, y’know, pick up some arrows or run to the next objective.

That objective being dictated to you by a quest-giving sorceress similarly memorable only for her impractical underwear. She’s

introduced as the subject of the meathead’s romantic dreams before turning out to be real – which makes sense, because she does look like she’s someone’s fantasy of a goth girlfriend. The fact that Lucy Lawless voices her is either a gift or an insult to *Xena: Warrior Princess* fans.

### BLOODY HELL

You journey across a self-consciously dark and gritty realm, where the villains are blood-splattered monstrosities, the skies are perpetually grey, and even the heroes are selfish mercenaries. Everything is so evil looking it actually becomes confusing – all the characters look like villains, and there’s no sense of what this world was before everything started going to shit halfway through the tutorial.

It’s strange going back to this era of RPGs. *Hunted* is an extreme example, but even classics like 2009’s *Dragon Age Origins* are marred by some similar sensibilities, seemingly desperate to be seen as ‘mature’ (pointlessly edgy) and appeal to a broader audience (of horny teenage boys). Why I am playing *Hunted* in 2022? Well, it’s good to remind yourself how far we’ve come. ■





# “Large-scale worlds would be a lot more fun as a little furball”

Touring the post-apocalypse as a cat in **STRAY**

**T**he post-apocalypse is much nicer when you're a foot off the ground, it turns out. *Stray*, the game where you're a tabby cat in a post-human world of robots, might not have the most imaginative take on the cyberpunk genre, but makes a compelling argument for why swapping out all the gruff dad and stoic lady protagonists for a cat is the easiest way to get everyone to play your game.

Developer BlueTwelve Studio cleverly hides the fact that *Stray* is just a point-and-click adventure game except your mouse is a paw and there are plenty of things to swipe at or perforate. I spoke with robots that wonder what it was like to be a human while wrapped in clothing and discarded remnants of the things they left behind. There are light puzzles to solve, which took me only a few leaps and pats to figure out, and the reward is a playfully grim story where the metallic citizens take their first step toward forgetting the past.

What I like most about *Stray* is how tangible its vision of a human-

▶ **TYLER COLP**



**THIS MONTH**  
Made biscuits on someone's couch.

**ALSO PLAYED**  
*Neon White, Bear and Breakfast*

less dystopia is and how long you get to play in it. The stakes are low as a cat, and the game allows you to skip through its alleyways and shops while making small talk with the people found in them. Halfway through the game, you stumble into its Midtown section. It's a collage of signs and neon lights with buildings stacked on top of each other like Lego. You can hear the clanks of a ramen shop and the radio of the street dancers a block away. Midtown pulls from the real Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong, and while *Stray* doesn't make an attempt to engage

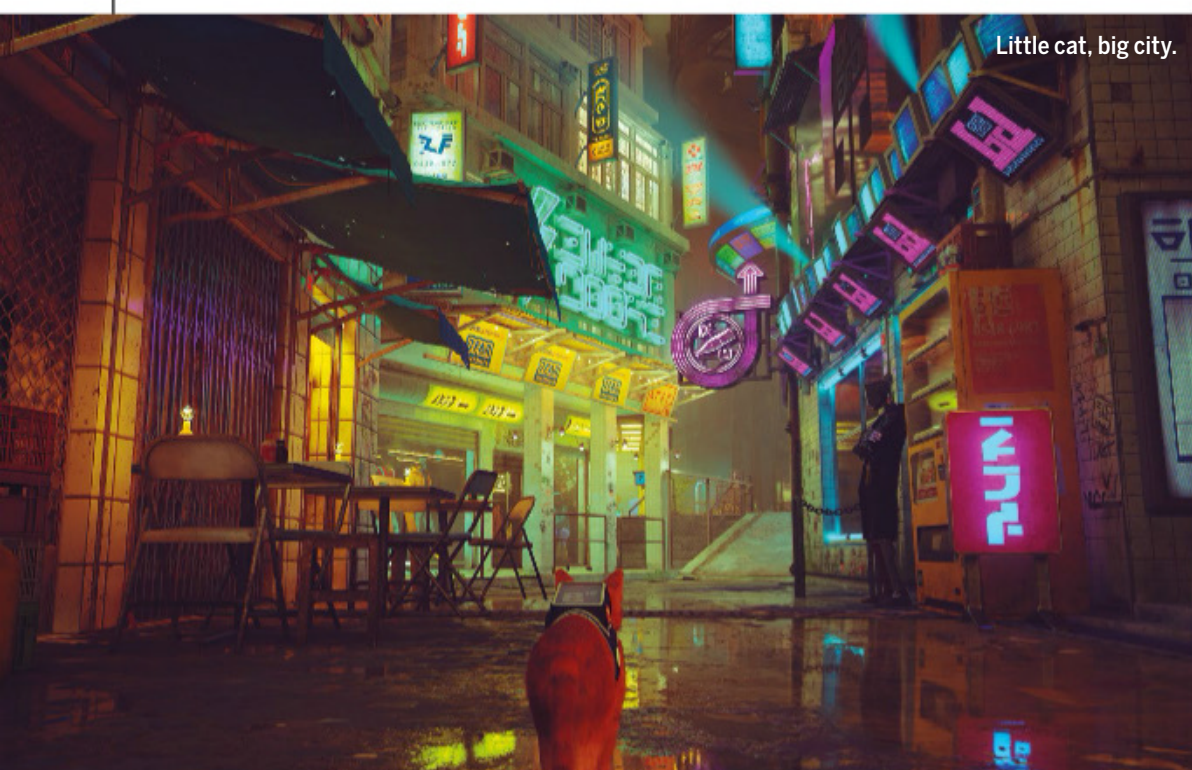
## I SPOKE WITH ROBOTS THAT WONDER WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE A HUMAN

with its fraught history, it does a stunning job at visually adapting what was one of the most densely populated cities in the world.

### CURL UP

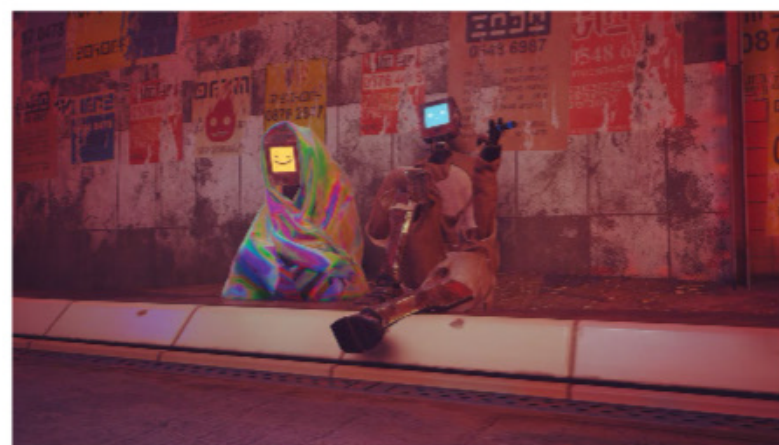
I could spend many hours in Midtown, taking screenshots and finding small vignettes that suggest a story all to themselves. *Stray* is at its best when it pauses and lets you squeeze into a corner and observe all the people around you before dozing off into a cat nap. It's like those aesthetic backgrounds that people load onto their desktops with Wallpaper Engine, but you can create a scene wherever you can nudge your furry cat-self into.

*Stray* makes me want to mod a cat into *Grand Theft Auto V* or drop a feline into *Skyrim*. Large-scale worlds would be a lot more fun as a little furball. The collective imagination for games that make you play a human is fairly limited. I think I've saved the world enough. *Stray* is the most compelling example for why more games should pass on people more often and put you in the hands of something else. Preferably more cats, please. ■



**LEFT:** The denizens of Midtown have fun.

**BELOW:** Midtown is full of life no matter where you look.







## “Skating mini-ramps for real distracted me from this mission”

**OLLIOLLI WORLD's** Void Riders DLC brings tractor-beams and extraterrestrial tricks to Radlandia

**I** bought a skateboard recently. And two games are to blame for this. The first is *The Ramp*, a mellow, digital skating toy that reliably occupies me for five minutes whenever I remember it exists.

But the other is *OlliOlli World*, Roll7's ostensibly chill, colourful and cartoonish skate platformer. Though at its meanest, it's also an obsessive trial of reaction-based challenges that awards short-lived victories to odysseys of failure, which I've delighted in trying to crack.

Skating mini-ramps for real with my meat legs distracted me from this mission. One especially graceless fall later, however, and I'm back. My avatar, wearing clothes cooler than any I'll ever own, doesn't just shame my skills but reduces my ego to ashes. Still, I couldn't have timed it better.

New to *OlliOlli World* is *VOID Riders*, its first DLC which populates shiny new biomes with aliens and new obstacles, among them 'grabby beams'. Doing a grab trick into one of

### KYLE HOEKSTRA



**THIS MONTH**  
Took my skate skills into outer space, left them there.

**ALSO PLAYED**  
*The Ramp*

these zero-G columns sends you sky-high, a novelty in a game given to grinding and sliding.

Grabby beams may offer a reassuring embrace, but they're tricky. They'll catch you as you tumble from a marathon of barely-controlled tricks, then abruptly throw you like a frisbee onto the next obstacle. More fundamentally, the beams bring your right thumb into play, wreaking havoc on your input mastery, such as it is. Grabby beams are floaty and fun, but bump the

## GRABBY BEAMS MAY OFFER A REASSURING EMBRACE, BUT THEY'RE TRICKY

ceiling, exit too slow or too low, and you're wiping out.

### HAIL NEBULORD

Grabby beams also help the new levels feel more chaotic. On Old Bridgey's Old Bridge, beams divide short ledges and bits of grinding rail for a fast-paced ride. On the other hand, one level is just a single block of grabby beam with vertical ramps either side. Your job is to collect all the cow piñatas floating within without colliding with obstacles. In 90 seconds. I'm glad I never see this variation of the grabby beam again.

Throughout *VOID Riders* we're aiming to impress none other than the Nebulord, a not-so-bad bad guy in keeping with *OlliOlli World's* cheerful universe. What else but these infernal devices to cap off the final level: the checkpoint-devoid Nebulord's palace. Here the grabby beams are the developer's chosen method to frustrate the player. But I beat it. It helps that throughout *OlliOlli World*, tension is stratified by goofiness. For my woes, I unlock the Nebulord's gelatinous head. ■





# TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER III

Immortal Empires is a messy masterpiece. *By Fraser Brown*

**I** was vibrating with excitement when I fired up the Immortal Empires beta. Despite its diminishing returns, I really dug *Total War: Warhammer III*'s Realm of Chaos campaign, but it felt like a starter designed to whet the appetite before the mega campaign's appearance. This is what I was waiting for. And, thank Sigmar, Creative Assembly has delivered.

278 factions and 86 playable legendary lords. That's how many groups are vying for control of *Warhammer*'s war-torn world. And what a world. Tiny, one-settlement islands, archipelagos surrounded by shipwrecks, massive continents full of deserts, forests and mountains shaped like skulls – it's a big place.

This collision of three games is, naturally, quite a bit larger than the already mind-bogglingly massive *Mortal Empires*, but adding all these extra races, factions and landmasses into the brawl does more than just fatten up the campaign. It's also been remixed, with familiar factions moved around to make use of all this extra

## NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE  
2022

DEVELOPER  
Creative Assembly

PUBLISHER  
Sega

LINK  
[warhammer3.totalwar.com](http://warhammer3.totalwar.com)

space and create interesting match-ups. You'll now find undead and dark elf pirates hanging around Cathay, for instance, who make excellent use of the rivers that cut through the empire.

Of the new additions, the Chaos armies leave the largest impact. Thanks to *Warhammer III*'s focus on daemons, Chaos quickly spreads in Immortal Empires, which will be good news for anyone who's grown sick of the Ordertide. The elves, dwarves and humans were much more likely to work together and overtake the forces of Chaos in *Mortal Empires*. But now they have Nurgle's plagues, Slaanesh's seductive abilities, Khorne's unrelenting armies and the magical powerhouse of Tzeentch to contend with.

In my first campaign, I picked one of the new Champions of Chaos factions, the Ecstatic Legions, led by the horny Azazel. The Champions of

Chaos are a lot like the armies of the Chaos gods, and in Azazel's case he gets a lot of Slaanesh's tricks, but they also have plenty of their own, like the ability to elevate units. Troops can be transformed from mortal humans to Chaos-infused nightmares, while mortal lords and heroes can eventually become daemon princes.

Despite the fact that Azazel wants to turn the world into his personal sex dungeon, he's not above diplomacy. In fact, it's his superpower. Just like in the Realm of Chaos campaign, Slaanesh's minions can seduce not just armies, but entire factions, building up their seductive influence until they can consume their target. This influence spreads by contact, both diplomatic and violent, so enemies and friends can be turned into vassals against their will.

## POWER-UP

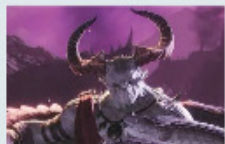
The advantage it gives you feels a lot more pronounced in Immortal Empires, thanks in part to the sheer number of targets you get. Great! I want to feel overpowered when I'm a daemonic monster on a conquest binge. And when I'm fighting said daemonic monster, I want to be terrified that my allies are going to fall to his influence. Given that this is in beta, we can expect balance tweaks to appear, but hopefully not so many of them that the wild asymmetry comes under threat.

Randomised mid and endgame scenarios prove to be a much more interesting way to stop players steamrolling the opposition. These events shake things up by throwing a huge challenge the player's way, like all the vampire factions rising up in an attempt to occupy their places of power and take over the world. When this one happened to me, I was mopping up the last holdouts of the empire. Ten turns later I was fighting for my very survival.

Empires can collapse in a few turns, and just as quickly old ones can come back from the dead. This constant cycle of death and rebirth sees borders perpetually undulate. A massive invasion with world-shaking ramifications could be happening on the other side of the map involving factions you've not even met. It should be too big, too unwieldy, and it's certainly very messy and hard to wrap your head around – there must be a limit to the number of unique faction mechanics the human brain can juggle – but it's all just brilliant. ■

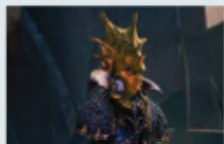
## RECRUITMENT DRIVE

Which of the 86 playable factions should you pick first?



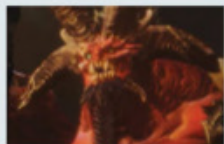
### ECSTATIC LEGIONS

Pick any of Slaanesh's lot and you're sure to have a good time, but if you get the Champions of Chaos DLC you should pick Azazel and try to seduce Kislev, Bretonnia and the Empire.



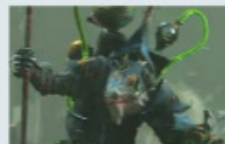
### BLESSED DREAD

Playing as Lokhir Fellheart's dark elf pirates guarantees a quick rise to power thanks to Cathay's many rivers and major ports, each of which allows the faction to field another Black Ark.



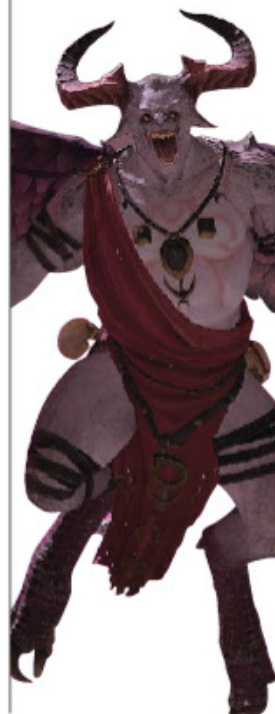
### EXILES OF KHORNE

If you just want to smash everything to pieces, Skarbrand and the Exiles of Khorne should keep you happy. Keep sacking and razing settlements and you'll get buffs and spawn more armies.



### CLAN SKYRE

Skaven are the best race, and Ikit Claw's Clan Skyre is the best skaven faction, so you've really got no excuse – go break the world with your horrible warp weapons and other nasty experiments.







I am actually here to make friends.



**LEFT:** Cathay might have dragons, but I've got a hydra.



**BELOW:** "I just want to make the world pink."







Enemies too high above your level won't become your nemesis.



**ABOVE:** Death isn't the end. It's the beginning of a revenge story.

**RIGHT:** This bandit is aiming to be my new main villain.







# SHADOW OF SKYRIM: NEMESIS

Elder Scrolls, meet Shadow of Mordor. *By Chris Livingston*

**I** wonder how many people, monsters, and animals I've killed in the hundreds of hours I've spent playing *Skyrim*. It'd be impossible to count up all the dead bandits, goblins, wolves, trolls, draugrs, falmer, vampires and yes, even occasionally city guards and innocent bystanders. Heck, I don't even have much of a sense of how many dragons I've slain, or what their names were. That's the problem with being a hero bristling with weapons and a long to-do list to complete: the finer details of exactly who I'm fighting and killing tends to become one big blur.

That's not just a problem in *Skyrim* but in many other games, but there was one RPG that had a fascinating solution, a way to make anonymous enemies memorable. *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor* had a nemesis system. When you were defeated in battle, the random orc or uruk who killed you became your nemesis. They were promoted, rising in Sauron's ranks. They gained a nickname and notoriety. They became more challenging to fight, with individualised armour and new abilities. And the urge to find and defeat them was a strong one. It turned what began as an encounter with an anonymous orc into a personal vendetta. Few things are as motivational as a grudge.

Brilliantly, a modder has recreated some of the features of *Shadow of Mordor*'s nemesis system and unleashed them in *Skyrim*. And I'd go as far as to say that if you're planning to start a new game of *Skyrim*, or

## NEED TO KNOW

**RELEASE**  
November 11, 2011

**DEVELOPER**  
Bethesda Game Studios

**PUBLISHER**  
Bethesda Softworks

**LINK**  
[bit.ly/3AdLBIK](http://bit.ly/3AdLBIK)

even continue one you're already playing, you should definitely try out the *Shadow of Skyrim* mod.

## MORTAL ENEMIES

The biggest change the mod makes is what happens when you die, because, well, you no longer actually die. If



## THE BIGGEST CHANGE IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE

you're beaten in battle, you collapse to the ground unconscious and wake up somewhere else. It probably won't be too far away from where you fell, and it's a situational system. If a city guard defeats you, for instance, you'll respawn in a jail cell. If a bandit takes you down, you'll probably wind up in another bandit camp. When you wake up, you might notice you're missing a few things. And that makes perfect sense. When you defeat someone in battle, don't you take their best stuff? Now your enemies do that to you, too.

And when you wake up, you'll have a new quest in your log: find your missing stuff and defeat the enemy that just handed you a vicious beatdown. Your gear might be somewhere near where you were defeated, but your new nemesis, if it's

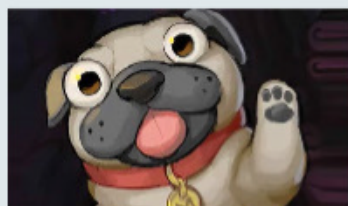
## FEE-FI-FOE-FUN

*These would be better with a nemesis system*



### HALF-LIFE 2

It'd help one stand out if it was called Savage Antlion Lord The Freeman-Impaler.



### SPELUNKY 2

Surely you've accidentally (or purposefully) iced the adorable pug. Now imagine it's bigger...



### OREGON TRAIL

You died of dysentery. And now it's named Captain Dysentery and has only grown more powerful.



### WINDOWS SOLITAIRE

That Four of Hearts you couldn't dig out from under that Jack of Spades is going to be elusive.



» a human or humanoid, might actually be wearing your armour and using your weapon, especially if it's of a higher quality than what they were using. That's embarrassing, huh? It's a little weird to be on the other side of a defeat-and-loot situation, and I can tell you from experience that tracking down the bandit that beat me up and seeing him wearing my armour is pretty darn enraging.

But before you go racing off for revenge, you might want to check your stats. The defeat you suffered was so psychologically and physically damaging that you've gained a debuff. After I let a wolf beat me just to see what would happen, I woke up with a Fear of Animals effect that made my attacks on animals less effective. A troll that pounded on me and became my nemesis resulted in me gaining a debuff that lowered my maximum carry weight. These debuffs cannot be dispelled by any means other than by either defeating your nemesis, or them perishing by other means. As long as your nemesis lives, you'll remain saddled with that debuff. Just more motivation to head out and strike back.

So, you've lost some of your gear and are weaker overall. Your nemesis, meanwhile, is living it up. Not only might they be swinging around your favourite weapon and wearing your armour and pocketing your gold, but their stats have improved, they've got a new buff, and they've been given a fancy new nickname. Just the idea of all that should propel you on a quest to put an end to them.

And the *Shadow of Skyrim* mod works with just about every enemy in *Skyrim*. I've tested it. The first thing I did was walk to a creek and let a little mudcrab snip away at my ankles. When that felt like it was taking too long I removed my armour to make it easier. Sure enough, when I flopped down unconscious and woke up a moment later in a nearby cave, I had a mudcrab nemesis. My new sworn enemy was now marked in my quest log and was called Gargantuan Mudcrab. While it didn't use my gear (though that would have been funny to see) it had definitely picked through my inventory and taken a good amount of my loot.

I tried it on humans, too. I strolled into Warmaiden's in Whiterun and started punching Ulfberth War-Bear until he drew his massive hammer and beat me to a pulp. When I woke

up in Dragonsreach a moment later and checked my nemesis log, he had a new title, Ulfberth War-Bear Belly-Piercer. OK, that name doesn't really inspire fear, and it doesn't make sense since he pancaked me with a hammer instead of jabbing a blade into my stomach, but still. While I was fighting Ulfberth for revenge, a Whiterun soldier ran in and stabbed me in the back, and his name became Guard Mickal the Sunderer, which is a bit better. And now I had two nemeses to deal with in Whiterun.

### BEST SERVED COLD

*Shadow of Skyrim* is also highly configurable. If you like the idea but don't like dealing with all the buffs and debuffs, you can turn them off individually. If you don't want to wake up in a random location, you can choose to instead respawn in the last bed you used. Just about every element of the mod can be adjusted, even the way you're looted when you're defeated. You can let the mod strip you of your gear and gold, set a percentage chance that you'll lose your weapon or specific pieces of armour, or disable that feature altogether. Even the finest details, like how much time passes while you're unconscious and how much health you have when you wake up, can be adjusted in the menu.

Maybe best of all is you can choose how much your enemy

changes physically when it becomes your nemesis. If you want to add more drama, you can set creature size and NPC size to the maximum. I let a horse kick me to death, it became my nemesis, and I returned to find it twice the size it was when we first fought. A giant horse nemesis! Even human NPCs will grow in size if you enable it, so your sworn enemy will

## SHADOW OF SKYRIM IS ALSO HIGHLY CONFIGURABLE

loom over you like a true boss. It'll make your victory feel even more sweet. If you win.

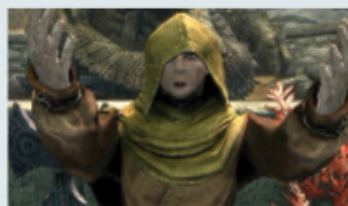
By default, the mod won't let certain enemies become your nemesis if they're more than 25 levels above you. Which makes sense: if you're low level and a troll stomps you, you're probably not going to succeed in taking down that same troll who has become even more powerful. But again, this can all be adjusted in the mod's menu. There are a few other restrictions: quest-related characters and essential (unkillable) characters won't become your nemesis, because killing them would absolutely screw up the game.

You can also only have five nemeses at once. If your roster of mortal enemies is full, and you're handed a beatdown, you won't gain a new nemesis. (If you're losing fights that often you may want to rethink your strategy.) On the plus side, if you're travelling with a companion and you're knocked out by an enemy, your pal will have a chance to revive you, meaning you won't gain a nemesis or a debuff.

*Shadow of Skyrim* is a bit of a bear to get installed if you're starting with a clean vanilla version of *Skyrim Special Edition* or *Skyrim Anniversary Edition*. *Shadow of Skyrim* has a half-dozen other mods it's dependent on, like *SkyUI* and *SKSE*, and some of those mods have their own dependencies, plus there are different versions of several of the mods depending on which version of *Skyrim* you're running. But the extra work getting it installed and running is well worth it. It makes losing fights fun, and turns anyone who beats you into a memorable boss. ■

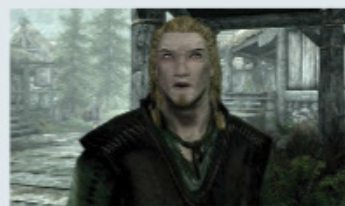
## KEEP YOUR ENEMIES CLOSE

*Don't want to make a nemesis of these guys*



### HEIMSKR

This is the guy who stands in Whiterun ranting 24/7. Do you want his yelling to be louder?



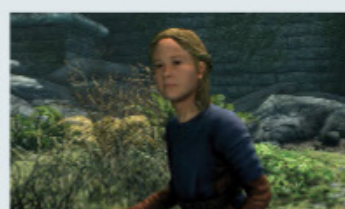
### BOLUND

He's the guy you buy lumber from to build a home. As a nemesis, his prices would only go up and up.



### ANY GUARD

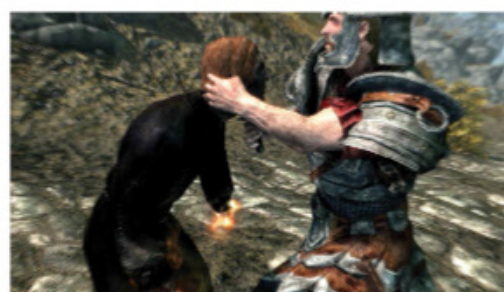
You think the knee stories were bad? The taunting and anecdotes would only grow more severe.



### THAT KID PLAYING TAG

Just imagine losing the game to this kid. She'll grow faster. More elusive. You'll never catch her.





**ABOVE:** Butterflies: one of the few creatures you can't make a nemesis.

**FAR LEFT:** Every fight has the potential for a rematch.



It takes two to tango.





## RAISE AN IMMORTAL EMPIRE IN

# TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER III

Best your rivals in the new trilogy-spanning campaign. *By Sean Martin*

### NEED TO KNOW

**DIFFICULTY**  
Hard

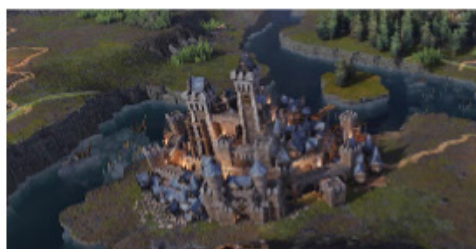
**TIME**  
20 - 30 hours

#### VITAL LINKS

Warhammer III tips:  
[bit.ly/3AH0d3I](https://bit.ly/3AH0d3I)

Chaos Realms guide:  
[bit.ly/3QM84CA](https://bit.ly/3QM84CA)

Daemons of Chaos:  
[bit.ly/3PKU22K](https://bit.ly/3PKU22K)



### GROWING PAINS

**1** Aside from slaughtering your foes, the first priority is to get some growth going to access better garrisons and units. Construct a growth building, use a commandment, a slave diktat, or even a hero skill. If you've got a port, that also counts as a growth building.



### TRADE PLACES

**2** Got a spare hero or lord lying around? Send them to find friendly factions who might agree to commerce. Since trade doesn't require access by land or sea, it's the best way to build a speedy source of income. Either that or take a chance with that treasure island.



### KEEP UP

**3** Another way to conserve your coins is to prioritise your legendary lord's blue skill tree. Among other things, this will grant them a hefty upkeep reduction for their army. Your lord might also have an upkeep reduction for specific units, so make sure you're using them.



### SUPER TROOPS

**4** You can level up these units using your lord's red skill tree. When combined with your faction's innate buff to those troops, it'll really help you punch above your weight, take on numbers far exceeding your own, but also keep those units and their XP gains alive.



### WALL OR NOTHING

**5** Immortal Empires is filled with roaming beastmen, orcs and ogres who'll eat your citizens. Building garrisons is the best way to hold onto what you took. If a town is besieged, it'll also give you time to get an army there to help.



### ORDER VS CHAOS

**6** The balance of the world centres around factions that like to blow shit up, and those that prefer the peaceful life. Depending on who you play, different factions will like you more. Keep these friends alive so you can offer support.



### FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

**7** Benefits like... being able to recruit greatswords into a Bretonnian army, or death runners into a dark elf warhost. Building outposts in allied settlements unlocks this recruitment, and it's the best way of compensating for your faction's weaknesses early on.



## THE USUAL SUSPECTS *Fun lords to try first in campaign*



1

### LOKHIR FELLHART

The Krakenlord trades the verdant shores of Lustria for Grand Cathay's rivers and rich cities ripe for sacking.

2

### VOLKMAR

Volkmar's ridden his war altar all the way to the Lands of the Dead, and faces off against Manfred Von Carstein.

3

### AZAZEL

This scion starts with access to Norsca, Kislev and the Empire; plenty of vassals to snare with your seductions.



### WAR WARY

**8** That said, be selective with your allies at first, since too many will mean you get pulled into more wars than you can handle with just one decent army. It's better to eliminate threats one by one to protect up your borders and keep new warfronts to a minimum.



### QUEST ASSURED

**9** In Immortal Empires, you no longer have to run around completing quest conditions to unlock the battle for your legendary lord's equipment. Once you reach the right level, you can teleport from the quest menu, and since his gear provides buffs you should grab it first.



### SEA THE WORLD

**10** Fancy a jaunt over to Naggaroth? Or perhaps a brief stay in Cathay? Immortal Empires features 'sea lanes', special markers that you can enter and use to travel to the far side of the world. Even better, it only takes a single turn; suspiciously quick if you ask me...



### MEET THE LOCALS

**11** There are new areas to conquer throughout Immortal Empires; whether it's the rivers of Cathay, infested with undead rebels and zombie pirates, the eastern colonies of the high elves, or the southern Chaos Wastes where Oxyotl wages war against daemons.



### ENDGAME TIMES

**12** There are lots of endgame events in Immortal Empires, from a dwarf-pocalypse to nightmare vampiric rituals. If you enjoy Armageddon of a particular flavour, you can choose your preferred end in campaign settings.





# LEARNING THAT CHEATS NEVER PROSPER IN WWE 2K22

Can the world's most pathetic  
wrestler capture the gold  
without winning a match fairly?

*By Matt Elliott*





**S**ome people grow up watching wrestling and dream of one day being WWE champion. Of winning the ultimate prize at Wrestlemania, the grandest stage of them all, while tens of thousands scream their name and millions more watch at home. Of carrying out feats of athleticism so grandiose they echo through eternity, then, now, forever...

The wrestler in this month's diary is not one of those people. Yes, he's on the hunt for championship gold. But he has no intention of entertaining you along the way. Your enjoyment is poison to him, your hatred ambrosia. He intends to clamber up the rankings ladder and win a championship belt – probably one of the ones you forgot existed – without ever winning a match fairly.

Say hello to the most unworthy contender in the history of sports entertainment: 'Luscious' Lord Fentiman Skett. He's named after the sound of someone running from conflict while wearing oversized homemade clogs. He's the sort of creature who stopped tying damsels to train tracks because he decided it was a waste of rope; a man who saves his red shells in Mario Kart so he can fire them back at people he's lapped. Fentiman Skett makes Ric Flair look like Bob Ross.

### CAWSOME KONG

Crimping this awful villain into existence is a painstaking process. The level of depth in *WWE 2K22* is intimidating, so I have to scour Skett's moves to make sure nothing inspiring, powerful, or entertaining accidentally wriggles, through like a historic bigoted tweet from an English cricketer. Skett is a ratings disaster, with his tedious arsenal of headlocks, roll-up pins and blatant cheating. His finisher, if you can call it that, is eye rake-low blow combo that even I'm tired of seeing, and he hasn't even had a match yet. As a concession to the noble art of wrestling I equip Skett with an athletic drop kick as a signature move. But it's not to impress people. Instead, it's an example of what Fentiman *could* do if renounced cheating. In a perfect world, I can hear Jim Ross's exasperated voice explaining it to fans, "Skett could get the damn job done

legally if he just applied himself. But he only wants to do it the easy way!"

Physically, he embodies the combined aesthetic qualities of ponderous Tory lollipop Jacob Rees-Mogg, fish-and-foreigner averse horror writer HP Lovecraft, and Eric the cowardly cavalier from Dungeons & Dragons. At 6'3" and 190lbs, he's about as suitable for a career in professional wrestling as I am at pitching diary pieces that won't make my life a screaming misery. More on that very shortly.

My plan, then, is not only to misappropriate a championship, but to keep hold of it by cheating. You can't

## I CAN USE HEYMAN TO DISTRACT THE REF, WHILE I PICK UP A SLIMY VICTORY

lose a belt by being disqualified, so I intend to make Skett the longest reigning champion who's never successfully defended his title. I've got a long way to go before that. I fire up Universe Mode and assign Skett to the Raw brand, assuming that I'll have a gruelling path ahead of me.

My first match, however, is inexplicably Raw's main event, facing off against Kevin Owens. Even more bizarrely, Paul Heyman is my manager. Narrative weirdness aside, this feels like the perfect way to trial Skett's nefarious ways. I can use Heyman to distract the ref, while I pick up a slimy victory. And it's around now, literally at the very start of my journey, that the weaknesses in my plan become apparent.

The most difficult thing in wrestling isn't playing hide-and-seek with John Cena. It isn't deciphering why Mae Young once gave birth to a hand. Nope, it's trying to cheat effectively in *WWE 2K22*. This game is absolutely, rigidly determined that you play by the rules. I assume that having Heyman at ringside will help, but I'm wrong. Apparently managers in *WWE 2K22* are there to do \*checks notes\* literally nothing. Instead, I decided to mercilessly bump the ref so I can break the rules while he's unconscious. One problem: whatever I do, the referee

will not stay down. I try whipping my opponent into him, but he deftly sidesteps each time. I try the more direct method of clattering him with a clothesline, but he no-sells like The Ultimate Warrior taking a Pedigree. There's a slider to determine how long the referee is dazed, but, even at its highest setting, the ref is back up before I've had time to pick up a chair, let alone swing it. This, combined with *WWE 2K22*'s byzantine controls, actually makes winning fairly harder than cheating.

### TURNBUCKLE UP

I decide I'm going about this the wrong way. Instead of knocking down the ref, Skett will distract him. It's possible to remove the turnbuckle cover in *WWE 2K22*, exposing the metal ring underneath. This sliver of

### THE RULES

1. No clean victories – every match has to include something illegal.

2. No kicking out of finishing moves, chair shots, or high spots.

3. No standard covers allowed – only rollups, possum pins, leverage pins, etc.







## JEER ARROGANCE *Six signature moves to send crowds to sleep*



### THE DISAPPOINTMENT

Countout or cheap DQ: make it a match they'll instantly forget!



### THE TURNBUCKLE TWIST

Fentiman Skett can remove a turnbuckle pad while blindfolded.



### THE CHEAP PIN

Use your core strength for the purpose god intended: cheating. Just hope the ref doesn't see.



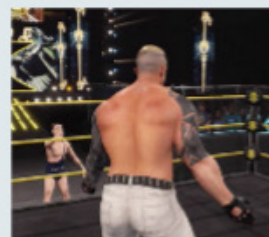
### UNCONSCIOUS OUTSIDE THE RING

Nothing confuses crowds and opponents quite like pretending to be dead.



### THE LOW BLOW

The truest test of your opponent's testicular fortitude. Why do they never wear a cup?



### RUNNING AWAY

When all else fails, steal a quick victory then bravely leg it. You don't lose the belt on a disqualification.

thin metal is apparently so dangerous that any interaction with it results in an instant DQ. Eventually, the ref will notice the missing pad, waddle across the ring, and replace it from his secret supply of endless turnbuckle covers, giving me time to brutalise my opponent with a foreign object. The only trouble? The one thing that 100% guarantees the ref's sudden interest in turnbuckle maintenance is Skett going for a pinfall. If that happens, the ref replaces the cover immediately, which is exactly the opposite of what I need to happen.

An alternate plan forms in my head. What if I remove the turnbuckle pad and trick my *opponent* into using it? That would be vintage Fentiman Skett. But that doesn't work either. Because I'm the one who removed the pad, slamming my smirking face into the exposed turnbuckle is suddenly legal. Similarly, during the three-second window when it's safe to use a weapon, I go to crack my opponent over the head with one of the 40 kendo sticks inexplicably hidden beneath the ring. But he manages to wrestle it off me and return the favour, all while the ref watches on. At the risk of sounding like a deflating balloon animal at a disappointing party, it's apparently fine when I'm the one being assaulted.

I'm beginning to feel Skett is the victim here, which is a very odd state of mind for a man expressly created to break the rules. I initially decided that I could only go

for the pin after using a foreign object on my opponent, but it's practically impossible to execute. For it to work I'd have to 1) remove a turnbuckle, 2) prepare a weapon, 3) wait for the ref to notice said turnbuckle, 4) jump back into the ring with the weapon, 5) hit my opponent, which only works 50% of the time, and 6) go for the pin once the ref is looking again. And that's such a conjunction of unlikely events that would herald some cataclysmic infernal event. So I decided that cheap pins can be part of Skett's victory strategy, so long as I've used a weapon at least once.

## RAW MEAT

Sadly, I'm not having an enriching time on Raw. I'm booked in a series of tag matches with random partners, which isn't much fun for a sociopath like Skett. More bafflingly, I end up competing for the Smackdown tag team belts during a PPV, even though I'm not assigned to the brand. Skett and his new partner, Angel Garza, manage to win the belts, but I decide this can't possibly count towards my goal. Skett doesn't share glory. And I need to feel like I've earned my stolen championship.

The final straw comes when I use the curation menu to push for more singles matches. Skett is still headlining, which feels wrong like your dad's Steely Dan cover band headlining Glastonbury. Worse yet, the game only wants me to fight Omos, the 7'3" Nigerian titan who could probably use Skett as a toothpick. After six consecutive matches against him, I decide it's time to change promotions.

## WHO'S NXT?

'Luscious' Lord Fentiman makes his NXT debut the next week, and to be honest, it feels like a more natural environment for him, not least because he looks like the third member of erstwhile NTX tag champs, the Vaudevillains. Yes, it's a step back, but I embrace it, not least because NXT's solid cruiserweight division means Skett isn't the smallest man on the roster. Better still, I have some tight, competitive matches, by which I mean I managed to cheat consistently without getting disqualified. There's also a strange,

**BELOW:** Just two lads, winning belts from a promotion they're not in.







## SKETT IS BOOKED AGAINST TOMMASO CIAMPA FOR THE NXT CHAMPIONSHIP

satisfying sense I've broken the game. My stats are so hilariously low that the commentators don't know how to talk about me. They skirt around my abject failures, talking about 'challenges' and 'resilience', like I'm a brave relative with an embarrassing disease. And this might actually be true, because, as I learn after turning the blood on, Skett bleeds like a man with moist rice paper for skin. The slightest hint of fist to forehead and he's Carrie White on prom night.

A few matches later, and the game throws up the curation menu, asking me what I want. A crippling sense of Britishness almost stops me from being honest about my desire for a title match, like an awkward vicar avoiding the last French Fancy, but in the end I relent and ask for a shot. And, sure enough, Skett is booked against Tommaso Ciampa for the NXT Championship.

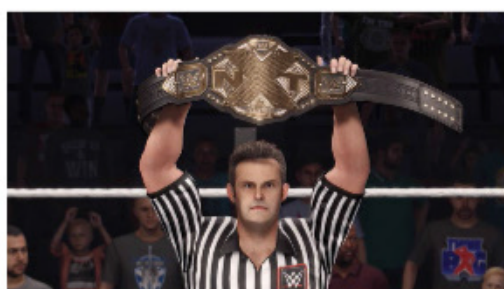
It's a decent match, and one that actually becomes slightly tense given the rules I've imposed on myself. A few times it feels like Ciampa is gearing up for his finisher, and I have to roll out of the ring and recuperate, knowing that I won't be

allowed to kick out if he lands it. After removing about 15 turnbuckle covers in total, I manage to finally catch Ciampa with a chair shot, which softens him up nicely. He kicks out of my dirty leverage pin, but I'm able to clatter him with a miserable low blow and roll him up for the win. Skett is a champion: a shitty, cheating, miserably disappointing champion. He celebrates this momentous victory by stamping the hell out of his fallen enemy. How utterly classy.

All that's left is to hold on to my not-actually very hard fought championship and get myself disqualified or counted out from the next match, which takes place at an NXT In Your House PPV. But, as always, there's a problem. It's a no disqualification Triple Threat match. I'm confident I can make it work, however. Skett immediately legs it from the ring, arms himself with a

weapon, and only gets involved when someone looks like they're in need of a thrashing. He dives in and out of the ring like a poisonous fish, delivering chair shots before retreating to relative safety. My opponents, Pete Dunne and Walter, do a fine job of pulverising each other and I plan to sweep in and finish the match. But disaster strikes: Dunne hits his finisher on Walter, and when I try to break up a pin with a baseball bat it doesn't work, so I drop my belt after a mere five days because of vomitous collision detection. Thus ends *WWE 2K22*'s moral lesson: cheaters never prosper, even when cheating is legal. ■

**ABOVE:** This guy bleeds just thinking about chair shots.





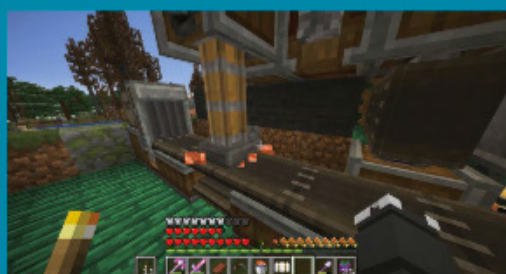


# WHY I LOVE

## WHAT MAKES GAMES SPECIAL

# MINECRAFT MODS

I can never go back to vanilla tree punching. *By Morgan Park*



**LEFT:** A mechanical press smushes useless ingots into sheets needed for recipes.

**RIGHT:** I may only have two minutes of oxygen left, but I'm living my best life.





**F**or the 12 years that I've been playing *Minecraft*, I've only ever been really interested in the 'mine' part. Every new world would go about the same: explore around a bit, carve a simple one-bedroom apartment into a mountain, mine a bunch of ore, make the best stuff, then get bored. I like to build things that serve a real purpose, so once I've fiddled with pistons a bit, enchanted my sword, and brewed some potions, my *Minecraft* is basically over.

This is why I wasn't jazzed when my friends started talking about firing up another multiplayer server. I'd gone through the motions as recently as last year, but this one would supposedly be different. This one would have mods – 129 to be exact.

There is so much more going on in *Minecraft* now that we might as well be playing its sequel. Among those 129 mods, some of my favourites are tiny adjustments to *Minecraft*'s existing loot and systems. We have backpacks that expand our inventory! A hunger system that doesn't suck! Inventory hotbar swapping! It's really been a dream.

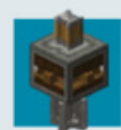
But the star of the show for me, by far, is the *Create* mod. *Create* is a monster of a mod that advances the technologically stagnant world of *Minecraft* with interactive machinery and automation. *Create* branches off from the usual tech tree of iron, diamonds and Redstone with cogs, gearboxes and conveyor belts made from alloys, wood and copper. The best part? *Create* machines work almost entirely diegetically. There's no fiddling – machines come to life

### NEED TO KNOW

|                  |                                                          |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| RELEASE<br>2011  | EXPECT TO PAY<br>£30                                     |
| OUR REVIEW<br>96 | LINK<br><a href="http://minecraft.net">minecraft.net</a> |

## ANDESITE VALLEY

*The impressive tech of Create mod*



### MECHANICAL MIXER

When placed above a basin, this baby can mix up just about any drink, potion, or alloy *Minecraft* can throw at you. Assembly required.



### MECHANICAL ARM

A piece of tech that can be programmed to grab specific objects and sort them into chests. A genuine robot, in *Minecraft*!



### MECHANICAL DRILL

Drills the crud out of whatever you put in front of it, or whatever you slam into it by attaching it to a rotating death machine.



### ENGINEER'S GOGGLES

A pair of specs that shows an overlay of a contraption's current speed, stress level, and other relevant stats. Make you look like a nerd.

with rotational power and make new things before your eyes.

### GAME INDUSTRY

I started my engineering career by constructing a humble water wheel on a river near our house. The wheel generates rotational power, which I can harness by linking shafts to cogs and then to machines like presses, mixers and fluid pumps. My first

demo of the device complete with bookmarks. And if I ever get confused by some other device used in the Ponder screen, I can simply click it to enter that item's tutorial.

Before long, I'd finished my second project: a windmill that carries strong rotational power down a dozen gears and gearboxes to power an automated mixer, metal press, automated crafting machine, conveyor belts, and a pipeline that feeds water from the river.

The process of linking devices to power sources is a big part of the fun, but the cool stuff you can make from Andesite alloy, copper, brass sheets, and rose quartz is also pretty cool. I never leave home with my helmet that sounds an alarm whenever a Creeper is nearby. My friend and I are now combining our engineering efforts toward building a factory that will eventually get us to full-blown trains. I can't wait.

### BLOCKED

Seven modders have created an engineering mod so good that it makes *Minecraft*'s tech tree look obtuse and silly by comparison. And while the *Create* mod tops over 25 million downloads, Mojang is just now getting around to adding real variety to *Minecraft*'s caves.

In 2022, *Minecraft*'s creators have found themselves behind the times in their own game, but it wasn't always this way. There was a time when Mojang took bigger swings with updates. I remember loading my world one 2011 afternoon to find I could make beds to skip the night.

That same year, *Minecraft* also got enchanting, brewing and pistons, the latter of which was officially adapted from a community mod. It was a time when *Minecraft* was still figuring out how big it wanted to be. The *Create* mod feels like it exists in an alternate reality where *Minecraft* kept getting deeper. It is now the only version of *Minecraft* I'm interested in playing. ■

## MINECRAFT'S CREATORS HAVE FOUND THEMSELVES BEHIND THE TIMES IN THEIR OWN GAME

build, a millstone that would allow my partner to make advanced recipes like spaghetti, was a lot of trial and error. It's ugly, but it totally works. We feed wheat to the to millstone, which grinds it into flour and then automatically carries it by conveyor belt to a storage chest.

In times of uncertainty, *Create*'s built-in tutorials are exactly what I need. If I'm ever confused about how a new piece of tech works, I can hold W to 'ponder' it, summoning a beautifully thorough interactive



**LEFT:** My toolbox can store anything I need and has a handy "return to box" button.

**RIGHT:** Soon, this factory will manufacture a train.







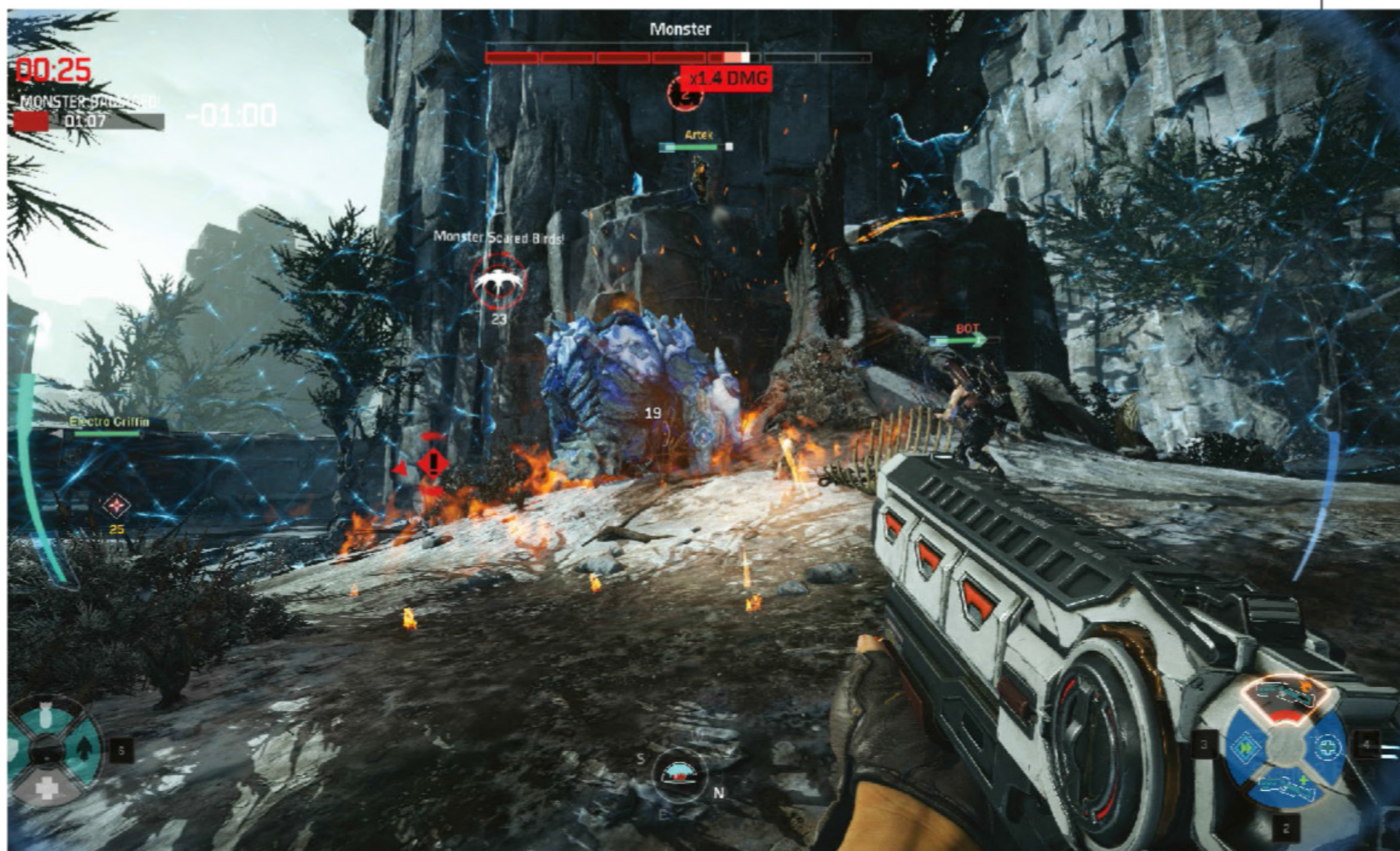
REINSTALL

OLD GAMES, NEW PERSPECTIVES



2K recently turned matchmaking  
back on for the game





# EVOLVE

This asymmetric multiplayer didn't go extinct, its DNA is everywhere. [Samantha Greer](#)

**E**volve came along too soon. It was definitely the victim of its own misguided marketing campaign, a push from its publisher 2K to front-load a season pass for DLC before the game had even been released. In our current climate of games saturated with passes of all kinds and microtransactions, *Evolve* almost seems quaint. It's more than business practices that came before their time, *Evolve* was ahead of the curve on a handful of design trends and while it might have died out, its DNA lived on.

2K recently, inexplicably, turned matchmaking back on for the game after years in limbo. It's in a bit of a sorry state, trapped in a transformation to free-to-play that never completed but once you're in a

game, all these years on, it still absolutely shines. You might not think of it in light of its controversies at the time but *Evolve* was a unique, thrilling game. The team at the then newly founded Turtle Rock Studios were fresh off their work on *Left 4 Dead*, and applying it's knack for co-op shenanigans to a whole new beast. The premise is nicely simple: a team of four hunters are up against an ever evolving monster.

## NATURAL SELECTION

Its roster of hunters is broken up into a handful of roles. Trappers for tracking and locking the monster down, assault for bringing lots of damage, medics to keep their team alive and support who offer a wide range of buffs or assists. What's neat as I dive back in is finding that *Evolve* had something nailed down that *Overwatch* would soon capitalise

**TOP:** For a seven year old game, it still looks really good!

on, having player roles and characters that weren't for twitchy shooter players. It allowed all sorts of people to play together. *Evolve* was never *Counter Strike* but still, it's welcome to have a game where people can contribute without having to master fine aiming.

I love playing as a medic, especially Cairn, and focusing on creating areas of healing for my buddies. As *Overwatch 2* seems set to chase after high-level esports play and ditch the qualities that made it an approachable shooter for many, *Evolve* feels like a promise now unfulfilled in the larger multiplayer

## NEED TO KNOW

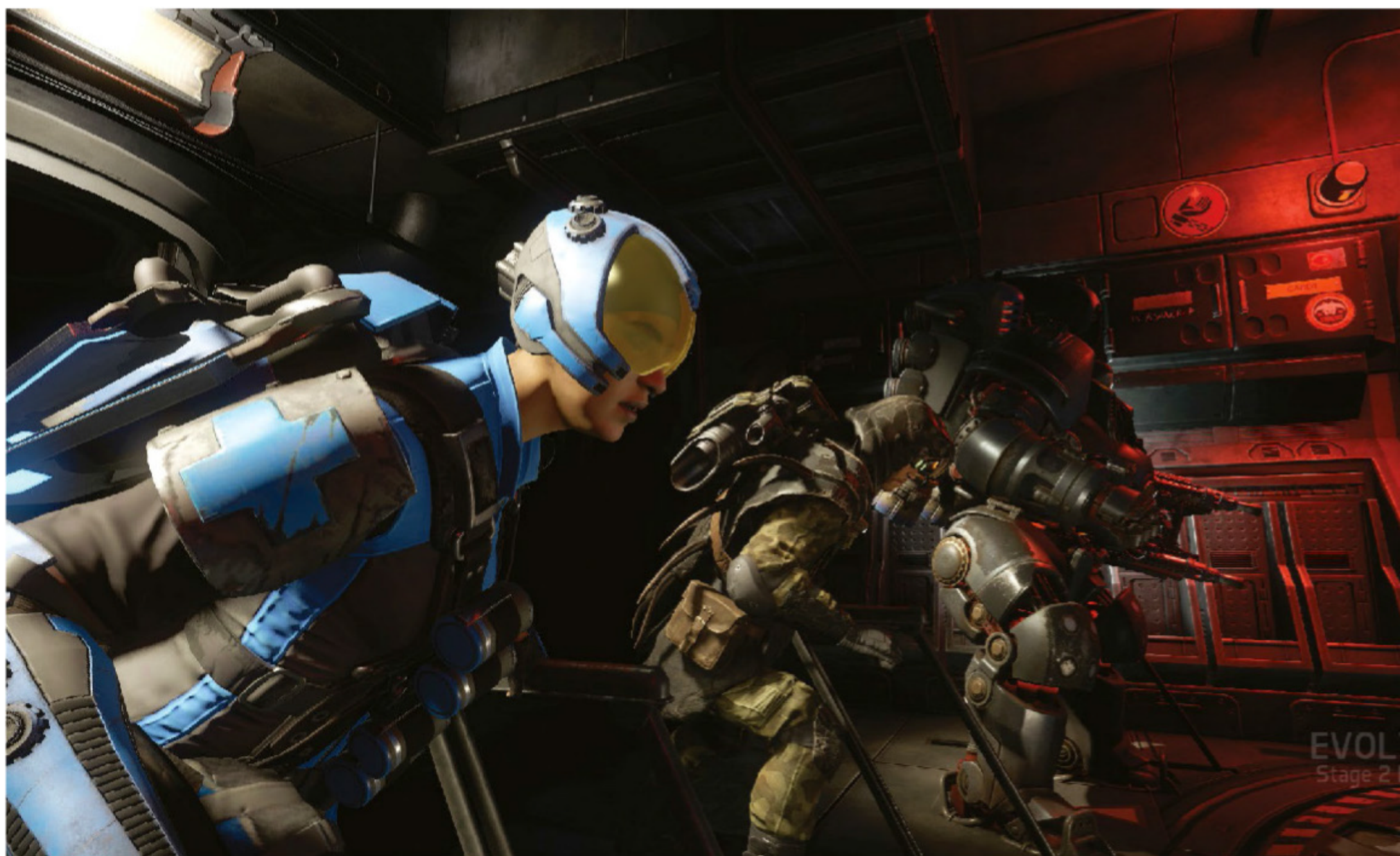
**RELEASE**  
February 10, 2015

**DEVELOPER**  
Turtle Rock Studios

**PUBLISHER**  
2K

**LINK**  
2k.com





» world. Their personalities are buried in the game's current state which treats every match like your first one, so always plays the tutorial voiceover instead of the banter that usually takes place while the hunters wait in the dropship as a match starts.

It pales a little compared with the richness of character *Vermintide* has served up so well in its co-op experience but its definitely in that ballpark, injecting life into something that could've been bare bones. It's a

fun way to flesh out a world we basically never see, filtering it through the perspectives of its cast so that the truth always remains a little out of reach.

### A KRAKEN TIME

Then there are the monsters. *Dead by Daylight* has popularised asymmetric multiplayer and maybe if *Evolve* launched today, it would have found an audience ready to master these beasties. The Goliath and Behemoth

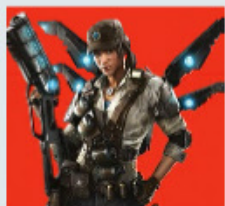
**ABOVE:** Finding the right team, in terms of players and their chosen characters, is essential for the hunters.

are the vanilla, raw strength monsters but the Kraken, Wraith and Gorgon are all stranger, creepier foes that really complement the spooky atmosphere of its nighttime maps. Each match has the monster starting in its weakest, stage one form. Here it must rely on stealth, to stay hidden and eat wildlife until it can evolve. If it manages to reach stage three, it's nigh-on indestructible and hunters are really gonna have to bring their A-game to beat it. This provides matches with an arc that helps shape these hunts into something with momentum and pressure.

Traipsing around its jungles and icy forests (which still look very good in 2022) I'm even reminded of *Hunt Showdown*, stalking enemies, with birds and traps that can be triggered, alerting the monster/hunters to the presence of their foe. It's a unique kind of tension *Evolve* captures, something akin to those big buff lads in *Predator* being stalked by an alien foe while trying to hunt it. It's a dynamic that shifts throughout the match. A monster can quickly become the prey if trapped in a space that doesn't suit its abilities. Likewise, all it takes is a hunter to end up split from the group and they can become monster lunch. It's all about the

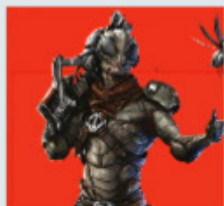
## HUNT LOWDOWN

*My favourites of Evolve's hunters*



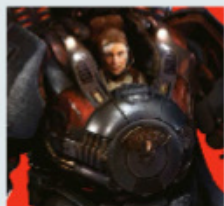
### CAIRA DIAZ MEDIC

Medics are my go-to in games, because they're not an option in many. Balancing healing and offence is rewarding, and so is Caira's grenade launcher.



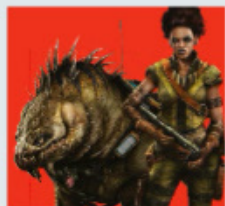
### SLIM MEDIC

My other favourite. He's a bug man! He smokes! He has a little scarf! That's cool as heck. Plus he uses his wings to fly instead of a jetpack, that's neat.



### IDA LENNOX ASSAULT

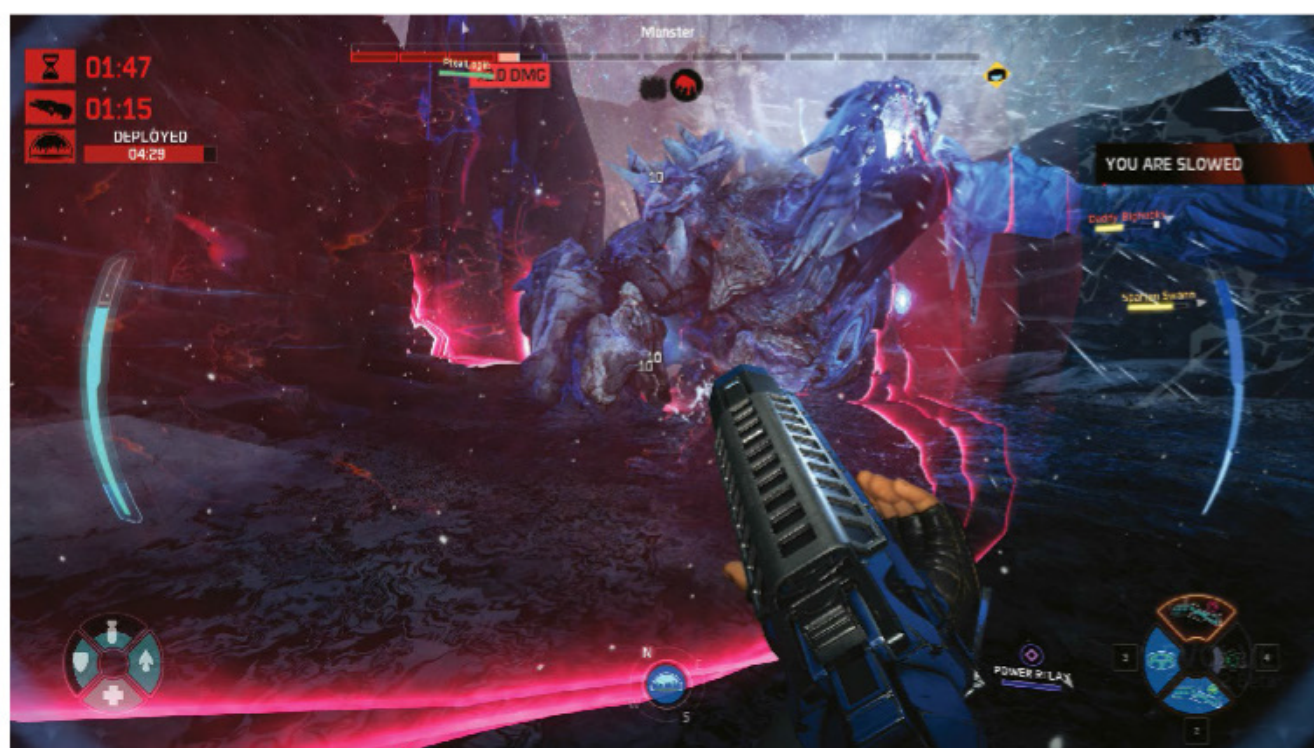
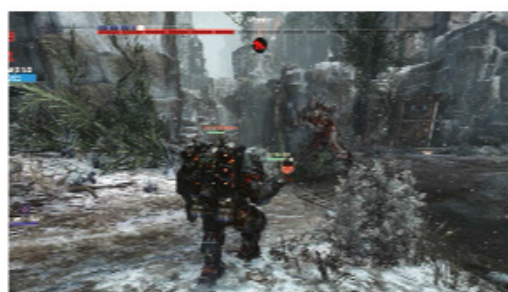
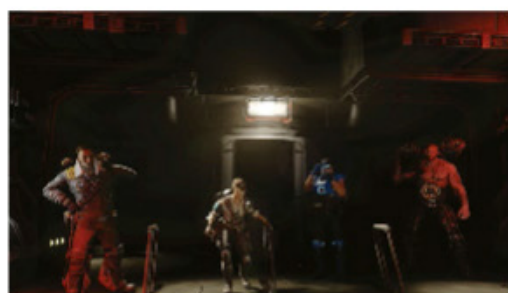
This old lady is all tough charisma stuffed into a mech she calls the Thunderchild. It rules and in the right hands, she can beat up a monster alone.



### MAGGIE LUMUMBA TRAPPER

She's lean, mean and has a pet 'trapjaw' called Daisy who helps her track down monsters. Monsters are her bread and butter, tracking them down just feels right.





**ABOVE:** At its best, *Evolve* produces memorable moments of daring feats or cunning plans.

**RIGHT:** If you can't find a full lobby, bots are always an option.



moment-to-moment decision making, knowing when to be cautious and when to take those risks. There are few multiplayer games that bottle that tension so perfectly but *Evolve* is one of them.

### BOGGED DOWN

The downside is that sometimes a match winds up a slog as you make all the wrong choices chasing after a monster you can never quite catch. It's rare but it does happen. Yet without the possibility of a dull match, there'd be no room for all the wild heroics that make it worthwhile. Watching a Lennox main (she's an old lady in a mech) wind up the last remaining hunter and still go toe-to-toe with the monster for a win is a feat that feels like it belongs in a history book. Using a player to lure the monster into a trap was a bit of inspiration that paid off in spades.

If I'm talking a lot from the hunter's perspective it's probably because I don't find the monster nearly as much fun to play as. I like being the underdogs and even at its weakest, the monster is clearly a sizeable threat. This is the thrill for the players who do play as the monster, trying to become the ultimate villain. It's a lonely role

## EVEN AT ITS WEAKEST, THE MONSTER IS CLEARLY A SIZEABLE THREAT

though with none of the explicit power of being the killer in *Dead By Daylight*. You really need to be quite good to succeed as the monster and that simply means, not a lot of players are gonna take that role. Which doesn't mean nobody does and there are bots to play against, it just means that with the game's small player pool, finding a deadly match is tricky.

### CLEVER GIRL

Even hunters don't have it easy though. Teamwork is essential thanks to the roles and playing with strangers is a real gamble than can bog a match down in misery if someone isn't doing their part. When the synergy is there, it's rewarding as hell but unless your playing with friends it's never guarantee. This was presumably *Evolve*'s flaw upon release. It is a demanding game even if, in terms of mechanics and skills, its relatively approachable. Strategy is where *Evolve* asks a lot. Anticipating your foes' moves is essential and it



can be a cruel learning curve for anyone playing the game alone. Its this possibility space, for ambushes and deception, that make *Evolve* such a rewarding game though. I think in avoiding these frictions we wind up with games devoid of downtime sure, but you lose out on all the fun stories. *Evolve* isn't quite the story machine that something like *Hunt Showdown* is but its closer than so much else. It's not every game that gives me moments I recall years later.

At the time of publication you cannot get your hands on *Evolve* unless you already owned a copy. The player base is not in a position to grow. Given it already pivoted to free-to-play, I hope, that given their already inexplicable decision they go a step further and let a new audience find it. I doubt it can become a hit in 2022 (especially when its creators have moved on to other things like *Back 4 Blood*) but I suspect *Evolve* would do better in the current games landscape than it did back in 2015. Stranger things have happened. It feels like a game that's on the cusp of greatness, a few tweaks and changes, perhaps a sequel, away from nailing the formula. A shame then, given its name, that it just never got enough of a chance to evolve. ■



## TED LITCHFIELD



For two and a half years I dodged Covid particles like Neo in *The Matrix* before finally getting got. These are the games that helped shepherd me through the feverish lands.



## PATHFINDER: WRATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

[wrath.owlcat.games](http://wrath.owlcat.games)

→ If you have 200 hours to spare, this game is for you. Bloated playtime figures often sound like a threat, but *WotR* continues to surprise and delight all the way through its campaign. It's generous and I had a hard time putting it down.



## DREAD DELUSION

[bit.ly/3dn7jkV](http://bit.ly/3dn7jkV)

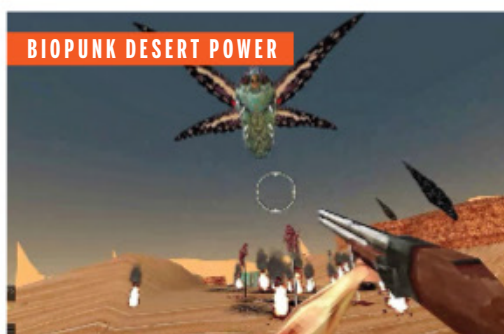
→ On the opposite end of the playtime scale from *WotR*, I got through *Dread Delusion's* Early Access content in eight hours, but I just can't stop thinking about it. Come for the meticulous world and level design, stay for the arrestingly good science fiction writing.



## HROT

[bit.ly/3A7cGxp](http://bit.ly/3A7cGxp)

→ This lightning fast retro FPS set in communist Czechoslovakia recently got a killer second act. Solo developer Spytihněv coded *Hrot's* engine from scratch, and its grim, monochrome look belies some clever trolling and dark humour. This is the funniest game I've ever played.



## WROUGHT FLESH

[bit.ly/3JKwhXb](http://bit.ly/3JKwhXb)

→ Another retro-styled FPS from a largely solo developer, *Wrought Flesh's* combat reminds me most of *Quake III*, demanding constant movement and tracking ability that I can only compare to that multiplayer FPS. The real draw is its eerie far-future setting.



## ULTRAKILL

[bit.ly/3v0uz1d](http://bit.ly/3v0uz1d)

→ *Ultrakill* is quite the fastest FPS I've ever played, demanding high-flying acrobatics and near-constant weapon switching. Act 1 took us to the Limbo, the metropolis of Lust and the desert of Greed, while its recently released Act 2 sports the underwater ruins of Wrath.



## DARK SOULS 3

[bit.ly/2skPBEj](http://bit.ly/2skPBEj)

→ I came back to my least favourite *Dark Souls* trying to slake my thirst after *Elden Ring*. Its multiplayer is still down at the time of writing, but *DS3* still has solid levels and bosses, as well as my favourite weapon in the series: the abyssal anime demon katana, the Frayed Blade.



## MULTIVERSUS

[bit.ly/3QtCEd](http://bit.ly/3QtCEd)

→ I'm a traditionalist – I believe platform fighting games are meant to be played through Nintendo mascots at a local tournament on a CRT with a guy who doesn't bathe, but even I can't deny the inherent humour of seeing Bugs Bunny murder Batman.



## TRACKMANIA² STADIUM

[bit.ly/3B0DaFc](http://bit.ly/3B0DaFc)

→ If you're lucky enough to have a group chat of people you've known since high school, I can't recommend any game more to play while catching up over Discord. Simple keyboard controls and robust physics simulation make for great fun on its extensive library of maps.





Future Publishing Ltd Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA | Tel: 01225 442244 | Email: letters@pcgamer.com | www.pcgamer.com

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Matt Elliott, Ian Evenden, Samantha Greer, Leana Hafer, Kyle Hoekstra, Kaile Hultner, Phil Iwaniuk, Luke Kemp, Matt Killeen, Daniella Lucas, Andy McGregor, Jessica Reyes, Tom Sykes

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# PUGILIST COMBOS

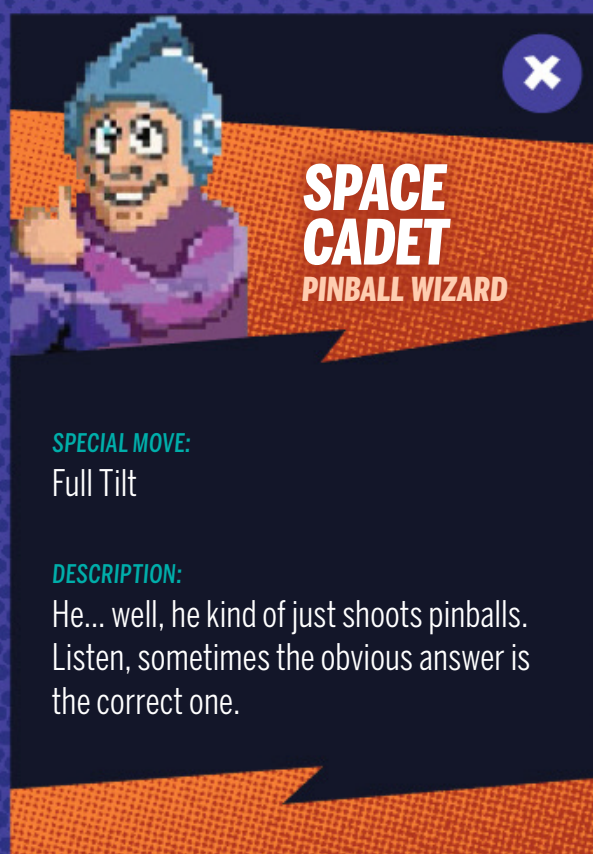
New characters coming to **MULTIVERSUS**, exclusively on PC!



**CRUSADER KING**  
MONARCH

**SPECIAL MOVE:**  
Summon Pope

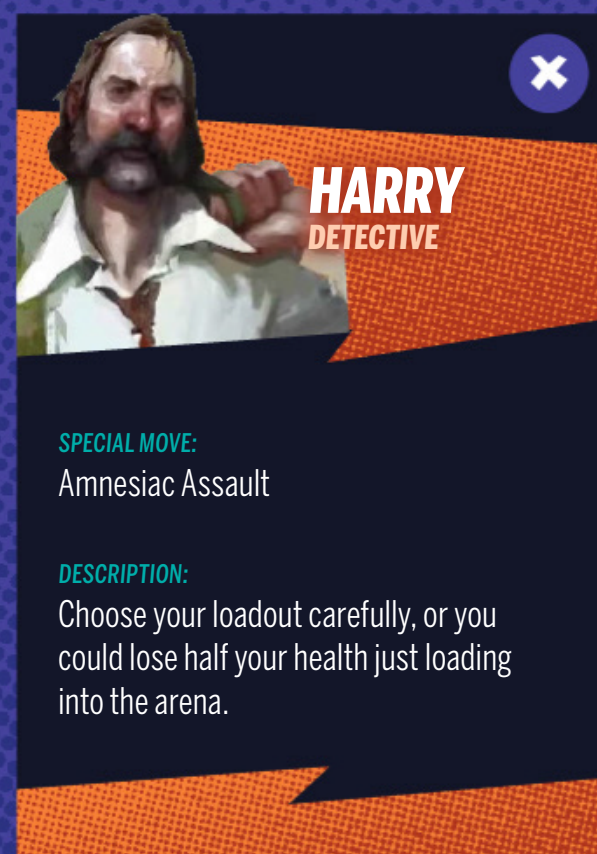
**DESCRIPTION:**  
Start plotting your opponent's defeat, and ten years later they'll die in a hunting accident.



**SPACE CADET**  
PINBALL WIZARD

**SPECIAL MOVE:**  
Full Tilt

**DESCRIPTION:**  
He... well, he kind of just shoots pinballs. Listen, sometimes the obvious answer is the correct one.



**HARRY**  
DETECTIVE

**SPECIAL MOVE:**  
Amnesiac Assault

**DESCRIPTION:**  
Choose your loadout carefully, or you could lose half your health just loading into the arena.



**ANATOLY CHERDENKO**  
PREMIER

**SPECIAL MOVE:**  
Stalin for Time

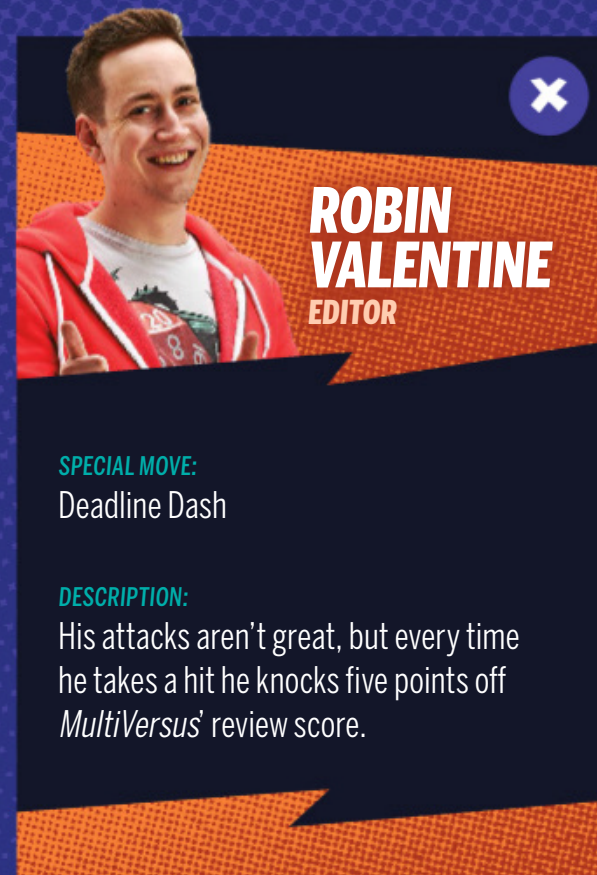
**DESCRIPTION:**  
Charge up your launcher to send your opponent flying up to the one place that hasn't been corrupted by capitalism.



**GABE NEWELL**  
COMPANY PRESIDENT

**SPECIAL MOVE:**  
Knife Collection

**DESCRIPTION:**  
He's got some incredibly powerful attacks, but don't spam them – he can only do each one twice.



**ROBIN VALENTINE**  
EDITOR

**SPECIAL MOVE:**  
Deadline Dash

**DESCRIPTION:**  
His attacks aren't great, but every time he takes a hit he knocks five points off *MultiVersus*' review score.

...UNTIL **OCT 13**



# WIN THE KINGDOM, OR TEAR IT DOWN!



## OUT NOW!

Classic GTA-gameplay gets a medieval makeover. The Great Tournament is offering the hand of the princess as a prize. Go from local brigand to champion. Or don't.

Guy (that's you) and his friend (conveniently named Buddy) are out to win the prize with holy hand grenades, pimped out horses, and their own personal minstrels in tow. It's madness and mayhem with true comedic flair.



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